

SOME FORERUNNERS OF  
ITALIAN OPERA  
—  
HENDERSON



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SOME FORERUNNERS  
OF  
ITALIAN OPERA

BY

W. J. HENDERSON

AUTHOR OF

"THE ORCHESTRA AND ORCHESTRAL MUSIC,"

"WHAT IS GOOD MUSIC," "THE

ART OF THE SINGER," ETC.



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TO HER

*“In a land of sand and ruin and gold  
There shone one woman, and none but she.”*

SWINBURNE



## P R E F A C E

THE purpose of this volume is to offer to the English reader a short study of the lyric drama in Italy prior to the birth of opera, and to note in its history the growth of the artistic elements and influences which finally led the Florentine reformers to resort to the ancient drama in their search for a simplified medium of expression. The author has not deemed it essential to his aims that he should recount the history of all European essays in the field of lyric drama, but only that of those which directly affected the Italians and were hence the most important. For this reason, while some attention is given in the beginning to the French and German liturgical plays, the story soon confines itself to Italy.

The study of the character and performance of the first Italian secular drama, the "Orfeo" of Poliziano, unquestionably a lyric work, is the result of some years of labor. The author believes that what he has to offer on this topic will be found to possess historical value. The subsequent development of the lyric drama under the combined influences of polyphonic secular composition and the growing Italian taste for luxurious spectacle has been narrated at some length, because the author believes that the reformatory movement of the Florentines was the outcome of dissatisfaction with musical conditions brought about as much by indulgence of the appetite for the purely sensuous elements in music as by blind adherence to the restrictive laws of ecclesiastic counterpoint.

With the advent of dramatic recitative the work ends. The history of seventeenth-



century opera, interesting as it is, does not belong to the subject especially treated in this volume. The authorities consulted will be named from time to time in the pages of the book.



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# SOME FORERUNNERS OF ITALIAN OPERA

## CHAPTER I

### THE EARLY LITURGICAL DRAMA

THE modern entertainment called opera is a child of the Roman Catholic Church. What might be described as operatic tendencies in the music of worship date further back than the foundation of Christianity. The Egyptians were accustomed to sing "jubilations" to their gods, and these consisted of florid cadences on prolonged vowel sounds. The Greeks caroled on vowels in honor of their deities. From these practices descended into the musical part of the earliest Christian worship a certain rhapsodic and exalted style of delivery, which is believed to have been St. Paul's "gift of tongues."

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That this element should have disappeared for a considerable time from the church music is not at all remarkable, for in the first steps toward regulating the liturgy simplification was a prime requisite. Thus in the centuries before Gregory the plain chant gained complete ascendancy in the church and under him it acquired a systematization which had in it the elements of permanency.

Yet it was through the adaptation of this very chant to the delineation of episodes in religious history that the path to the opera was opened. The church slowly built up a ritual which offered no small amount of graphic interest for the eyes of the congregation. As ceremonials became more and more elaborate, they approached more and more closely the ground on which the ancient dramatic dance rested, and it was not long before they themselves acquired a distinctly dramatic character. It is at this point that the liturgical

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ancestry of the opera becomes quite manifest. The dance itself, at first an attempt to delineate dramatically by means of measured movement, and thus the origin of the art of dramatic action, was not without its place in the early church. The ancient pagan festivals made use of the dance, and the early Christians borrowed it from them. At one time Christian priests executed solemn dances before their altars just as their Greek predecessors had done. But in the course of time the dance became generally practised by the congregation and this gave rise to abuses. The authorities of the church abandoned it. But the feeling for it lingered, and in after years issued in the employment of the procession. When the procession left the sanctuary and displayed itself in the open air, something of the nature of the dance returned to it and its development into a dramatic spectacle was not difficult.

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According to Magnin<sup>1</sup> the lyric drama of the Middle Ages had three sources, — the aristocracy, religion and the people. Coussemaker finds that this lyric drama had in its inception two chief varieties, namely, the secular drama, and the religious or liturgical drama. "Each of these dramas," he says, "had its own particular subject matter, character, charms and style. The music, which formed an integral part of it, was equally different in the one from the other."<sup>2</sup>

The liturgical drama, which was chronologically the first of the two forms, originated, as we have noted, in the ceremonies of the Christian church, in the strong dramatic element which inheres in the mass, the Christmas fêtes, and those of the Epiphany, the Palms and the Passion. These are all scenes

<sup>1</sup> "Les Origines du Théâtre Moderne ou Histoire du Génie Dramatique depuis le Premier Siècle jusqu'au XVI<sup>e</sup>." Paris, 1838.

<sup>2</sup> "Histoire de l'Harmonie au Moyen Age." Paris, 1852.



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in the drama of the sacrifice of the Redeemer, and it required but small progress to develop them into real dramatic performances, designed for the instruction of a people which as yet had no literature.

The wearing of appropriate costumes by priest, deacon, sub-deacon and boys of the choir is in certain ceremonies associated with the use of melody and accent equally suited to the several rôles. Each festival is an anniversary, and in the early church was celebrated with rites, chants and ornaments corresponding to its origin. The Noël, for example, was supposed to be the song which the angels sang at the nativity, and for the sake of realistic effect some of the Latin churches used the Greek words which they thought approached most closely to the original text. The Passion was the subject of a series of little dramas enacted as ceremonials of holy week in all the Catholic churches.

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Out of these ceremonies, then, grew the liturgical drama. The most ancient specimens of it which have come down to us are those collected under the title "*Vierges sages et Vierges folles*," preserved in MS. 1139 of the national library at Paris. The manuscript contains two of these dramas and a fragment of a third. The first is the "*Three Maries*." This is an office of the sepulcher, and has five personages: an angel, the guardian of the tomb and the three Maries.

The drama of the wise and foolish virgins, which was thoroughly examined by M. Magnin and by Coussemaker after him, is simple in construction. It begins with a chorus in Latin, the theme of which is indicated by the first words:

"*Adest sponsus qui est Christus: vigilate, virgines.*"

This chorus is set to a melody grave and plaintive. Then the archangel Gabriel, using

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the Provençal tongue, announces the coming of Christ and tells what the Savior has suffered on earth for the sins of man. Each strophe is terminated by a refrain, of which the conclusion has the same melody as the first stanza of each of the strophes. The foolish virgins confess their sins and beg their sisters for help. They sing in Latin, and their three strophes have a melody different from that of the preceding strophes. They terminate, like the others, with a sad and plaintive refrain, of which the words are Provençal:

“Dolentas! Chaitivas! trop i avem dormit.”

In modern French this line reads, “Malheureuses! Chétives! Nous avons trop dormi!” The wise virgins refuse the oil and bid their foolish sisters to go and buy it. All the strophes change the melody at each change of personages. The little drama comes to its end with the intervention of Christ, who condemns

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the foolish virgins. The words of the Savior have no music. Coussemaker wonders whether the musician was unable to find a melody worthy to be sung by the Savior or intentionally made Him speak instead of chant. The same author, in his "*Histoire de l'Harmonie au Moyen Age*," gives facsimiles of all the pages of the original manuscript of this play. The notation, that of the eleventh century, is beautifully clear, and its deciphering is made easier by the presence of a line ruled across the page to indicate the relative positions of the notes. The music of these dramas is what we should naturally expect it to be, if we take into account the character of the text. The subjects of the dramas were always incidents from the Bible and the plays were represented in churches by priests or those close to them.

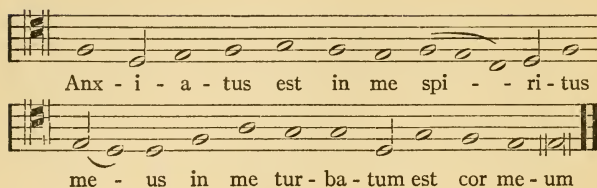
It is certain that the educational drama of the church continued in the state of its infancy for several centuries. Even after the birth of

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the "Sacra Rappresentazione" in the fourteenth century the old-fashioned liturgical drama survived in Italy and was preserved in activity in other parts of Europe. Several interesting manuscripts in great libraries attest the consideration accorded to it at a period much later than that of which we have been speaking. Nevertheless the era of the origin of the plays as a rule will be found to antedate that of the manuscripts. For example, in the royal library of Berlin there is a fifteenth century manuscript of a liturgical drama entitled, "Die Marienklage." Dr. Frommann, of Nuremberg, after careful study, has decided that the play was of middle German (perhaps Thuringian) origin in the fourteenth century. This play is in part sung and in part spoken.<sup>1</sup> It begins with this bit of Latin chant by Mary:

<sup>1</sup> See Robert Eitner's introduction to the First Part of "Die Oper von ihren ersten Anfängen bis zur Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts." Leipsic, 1881.

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The rest of the text is in old German.  
Here is a specimen of the recitative or chant  
with the German text:

Gross - er cla - ge ist mir not ou - we, leg ich  
vor yn . . . . tod! Vat - er, schöp - fer, . . .  
Vat - er, schöp - fer . . . bist . . du . . . myn.

These recitatives are in a style exactly like  
that of the early French church plays.

As Coussemaker notes, one does not find in  
these plays the passions, the intrigues nor the  
scenic movement found in the secular drama.  
What we do find is calm simplicity of state-

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ment, elevation and nobility of thought, purity of moral principles. The music designed to present these ideas in a high light necessarily has an appropriate character. We do not find here music of strongly marked rhythm and clearly defined measure, suitable to the utterance of worldly emotions, but a melody resembling the chant, written in the tonalities used in the church, but containing a certain kind of prose rhythm and accentuation, such as exists in the Gregorian music.

This was the inevitable march of development. The liturgical drama originated, as has been shown, in the celebration of certain offices and fêtes, for which the music assumed a style of delivery clothed in unwonted pomp. Characters and costumes and specially composed music soon found their way into these ceremonies. The new music followed the old lines and preserved the character of the liturgical chant. Gradually these accessories rose to

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the importance of separate incidents and finally to that of dramas. But they did not lose their original literary and musical character.

In studying the development of a secular lyric drama, it is essential that we keep in mind the nature of the music employed in the dramatic ceremonials, and later in the frankly theatrical representations of the church. The opera is a child of Italy and its direct ancestors must be sought there. The first secular musical plays of France far antedated the birth of the primitive lyric drama of Italy, and it requires something more than scientific devotion to establish a close connection between the two. But the early French ecclesiastical play is directly related to that of Italy. Both were products of the Catholic Church. Both employed the same texts and the same kind of music. They were developed by similar conditions; they were performed in similar circumstances and under the same rules.



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For these reasons it is proper to discuss the early French religious drama and that of Italy as practically one and the same thing, and to pass without discrimination from the first performances of such plays outside the church to the establishment of that well-defined variety known in Italy as the "Sacre Rappresentazioni." This form, as we shall see, was the immediate outgrowth of the "laud," but one of its ancestors was the open-air performances. The emergence of the churchly play into the open was effected through the agency of ecclesiastic ceremonial. Pagan traditions and festivities died a hard death in the early years of Christianity, and some of them, instead of passing entirely out of the world of worship, maintained their existence in a transformed shape. Funerals, as Chouquet<sup>1</sup> pointedly notes, "provided the occasion for scenic per-

<sup>1</sup> "Histoire de la Musique Dramatique en France," par Gustave Chouquet. Paris, 1873.

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formances and certain religious fêtes the pretext for profane ceremonies.”

The fête of the ass, celebrated on January 14 every year at Beauvais, was an excellent example of this sort of ceremony. This was a representation of the flight into Egypt. A beautiful young woman, carrying in her arms an infant gorgeously dressed, was mounted on an ass. Then she moved with a procession from the cathedral to the church of St. Etienne. The procession marched into the choir, while the girl, still riding the ass, took a position in front of the altar. Then the mass was celebrated, and at the end of each part the words “Hin han” were chanted in imitation of the braying of the beast. The officiating priest, instead of chanting the “Ite missa est,” invited the congregation to join in imitating the bray.

This simple procession in time developed into a much more pretentious liturgical drama

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called "The Prophets of Christ." But this appearance in the open streets was doubtless the beginning of the custom of enacting sacred plays in the public squares of cities and small towns. The fête of the ass dates from the eleventh century, and we shall see that open-air performances of religious dramas took place in the twelfth, if no sooner.

Other significant elements of the fête of the ass and similar ceremonials were the singing of choruses by the populace and dancing. In the Beauvais "Flight into Egypt" at one point the choir sang an old song, half Latin and half French, before the ass, clothed in a cope.

"Hez, sire Asnes, car chantez !  
Belle bouche rechignez ;  
Vous aurez du foin assez  
Et de l'avoine a plantez."

This refrain was changed after each stanza of the Latin. The people of Limoges, in their yearly festival, sang :

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“San Marceau, pregas per nous,  
E nous epingarem per vous.”

In the seventeenth century these good people of Limoges were still holding a festival in honor of the patron saint of their parish, and singing:

“Saint Martial, priez pour nous,  
Et nous, nous danserons pour vous!”

This choral dance formed in the church, and continued to the middle of the nave, and thence to the square before the edifice, or even into the cemetery. At a period later than that first mentioned these dances had instrumental accompaniment and became animated even to the verge of hysteria. Thus unwittingly the people of the medieval church were gathering into a loose, but by no means unformed, union the same materials as the ancients used in the creation of their drama.

The earnest Lewis Riccoboni<sup>1</sup> holds that the

<sup>1</sup> “An Historical and Critical Account of the

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Fraternity of the Gonfalone, founded in 1264, was accustomed to enact the Passion in the Coliseum, and that these performances lasted till Paul III abolished them in 1549. Riccoboni argues that not the performance was interdicted, but the use of the Coliseum. This matters not greatly, since it is perfectly certain that out-door performances of the Passion took place long before 1549. Those which were given in France were extremely interesting and in regard to them we have important records. It is established beyond doubt that near the end of the fourteenth century a company of players called the Fraternity of the Passion assisted at the festivities attendant upon the marriage of Charles VI and Isabella of Bavaria. Thereafter they gave public performances of their version of the Passion.

Theaters in Europe," by Lewis Riccoboni, translated from the Italian. London, 1741.

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It was too long to be performed without rest, and it was therefore divided into several days' work. It employed eighty-seven personages and made use of elaborate machinery. There seems to be little doubt that some of the scenes were sung, and there is no question that there were choruses. The stage directions are not the least remarkable part of this play. The baptism is set forth in this wise: "Here Jesus enters the waters of Jordan, all naked, and Saint John takes some of the water in his hand and throws it on the head of Jesus." Saint John says:

"Sir, you now baptized are,  
As it suits my simple skill,  
Not the lofty rank you fill;  
Unmeet for such great service I;  
Yet my God, so debonair,  
All that's wanting will supply."

"Here Jesus comes out of the river Jordan and throws himself upon his knees, all naked, before Paradise. Then God, the Father, speaks,

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and the Holy Ghost descends, in the form of a white dove, upon the head of Jesus, and then returns into Paradise: and note that the words of God the Father be very audibly pronounced and well sounded in three voices, that is to say, a treble, a counter-treble and a counter-bass, all in tune; and in this way must the following lines be repeated:

‘Hic est filius meus dilectus,  
In quo mihi bene complacui.  
C’estui-ci est mon fils amé Jesus,  
Que bien me plaist, ma plaisance est en lui.’”

Students are offered another choice of dates for the beginning of the performance of sacred plays in the open air in Italy, to wit, 1304. Vasari says that in this year a play was enacted on the Arno, that a “machine representing hell was fixed upon the boats, and that the subject of the drama was the perennially popular tale of “Dives and Lazarus.” But Vasari was not born till 1512, and he neg-

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lected to state where he got his information. The latter years of the fourteenth century, at any rate, saw the open-air sacred drama in full action, and that suffices for our purpose.



## CHAPTER II

### THE SACRE RAPPRESENTAZIONI

LEAVING D'Ancona, Vasari and the others in their confusion of dates, we find ourselves provided with a satisfactory point of departure and with some facts well defined. The drift of Provençal ideas over the borders into Lombardy may or may not have given some impetus to the growth of certain forms in Tuscany and Umbria, but at any rate it is clear that the Italian form of "Sacre Rappresentazioni" grew chiefly out of the poetic form called "Laud."

This itself was one of the products of a religious emotion. To observe it in its cradle we must go back to the beginnings of Italian literature. The seemingly endless battle between Emperor and Pope, which scarred the

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soul of Italy through so many years, was at that time raging between Frederick II and Innocent III and Gregory IX. The land reeked with carnage, rapine, murder, fire and famine. So great was the force of all this that the people fell into a state of religious terror. They believed that the vengeance of a wrathful God must immediately descend upon the country, and as a penance the practice of flagellation was introduced.

Against this horrible atonement came a violent reaction, and out of the reaction attempts to continue in a soberer and more rational form the propitiatory ideas of the flagellants. The chief furtherers of these reforms were lay fraternities, calling themselves *Disciplinati di Gesu Cristo*. From the very outset these fraternities practised the singing of hymns in Italian, instead of Latin, the church language. These hymns dealt chiefly with the Passion. They were called "Lauds" and

they had a rude directness and unlettered force which the Latin hymns never possessed. Presently the *disciplinati* became known as *Laudesi*. The master maker of "Lauds" was Jacopone da Todi and his most significant production took the form of a dialogue between Mary and the Savior on the cross, followed by the lamentation of the mother over her Son. Mary at one point appeals to Pilate, but is interrupted by the chorus of Jews, crying "Crucify him!" Many other "Lauds," however, were rather more in the manner of short songs than in that of the subsequently developed cantata. The music employed was without doubt that of the popular songs of the time. It appears to have made no difference to the Italians what kind of tune they employed. They "sang the same *strambotti* to the Virgin and the lady of their love, to the rose of Jericho and the red rose of the balcony."

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Here, then, we find a significant difference between the liturgical drama and the sacred representations. The chant, which was the musical garb of the former appears to have had no position in the latter. We shall perceive later that this difference marked a point of departure from which the entire lyric drama of the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, prior to the invention of dramatic recitative by the Florentines, proceeded to move in a musical world of its own.

The sacred representations built up a method complex and pregnant without changing upon the defining element of opera. And this result was reached chiefly, if not solely, because the ecclesiastic chant was not employed. In its stead the musical forms practised by composers of secular music and adopted by musicians of such small education as hardly to be worthy of the title of composers, makers of carnival songs and frottole,

predominated and determined the musical character not only of the Sacre Rappresentazioni, but also of the secular lyric plays which succeeded them and which continued to exist in Italy even after the "stile rappresentativo" had been introduced in the primitive *dramma per musica* of Caccini and Peri.

A closer examination of the songs of this period and of the manner in which they affected the lyric character of the sacred plays and the succeeding secular dramas may be postponed until we have permitted ourselves a glance at the character of the sacred plays as literary products and have taken into account the manner of their performance.

The *Disciplinati di Gesu* began by intoning their lauds before a crucifix or the shrine of some saint. Presently they introduced antiphonal singing and in the end dialogue and action. By the middle of the fourteenth century the laud came to be called "Divozione."

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After being written in a number of meters it finally adhered to the *ottava rima*, the stanza generally used in the popular poetry of the fifteenth century. It was the custom to sing these dramatic lauds or "Divozioni" in the oratories. Every fraternity had a collection of such lauds and that they were performed with much detail is easily ascertained.

Records of the Perugian Confraternity of San Domenico for 1339 show that wings and crowns for angels, a crimson robe for Christ, black veils for the Maries, a coat of mail for Longinus, a dove to symbolize the Holy Ghost and other properties had been used. By 1375 the "Divozioni" were acted in church on a specially constructed stage, built against the screen separating the choir from the nave. The audience sat in the nave, and a preacher from time to time made explanations and comments. The stage had two stories, the upper of which was reserved for celestial beings.

## The Sacre Rappresentazioni 27

The "Divozione" appears to be, as Symonds declares it to be, the Italian variety of liturgical drama. The Sacra Rappresentazione, which was developed from it, was a very different affair. Just when these representations took definite individual form is not known, but the period of their high development was from 1470 to 1520. It was precisely at this time that their entire apparatus was adapted to the dramatization of secular stories and the secular lyric drama came into existence.

This whole subject has been exhaustively treated by John Addington Symonds in the fourth volume in his great work "The Renaissance in Italy." He examines briefly, but suggestively, D'Ancona's theory, that the "Sacre Rappresentazioni" resulted from a blending of the Umbrian divozioni with the civic pageants of St. John's Day in Florence. Civic pageants were common and in them sacred and profane elements were curiously

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mingled. For example, "Perugia gratified Eugenius IV in 1444 with the story of the Minotaur, the tragedy of Iphigenia, the Nativity and the Ascension."

In the great midsummer pageant of St. John's Day there were twenty-two floats with scenery and actors to represent such events as the Delivery of the Law to Moses, the Creation, the Temptation, etc. The machinery of those shows was so elaborate that the cathedral plaza was covered with a blue awning to represent the heavens, while wooden frames, covered with wool and lighted up, represented clouds amid which various saints appeared. Iron supports bore up children dressed as angels and the whole was made to "move slowly on the backs of bearers concealed beneath the frame."

We are justified in inferring that ability to supply an elaborate scenic investiture for the sacred drama was not wanting. When the



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sacred plays began to be written, their authors were for the most part persons of no distinction, but Lorenzo de Medici wrote one and Pulci also contributed to this form of art. The best writers, according to Symonds, were Feo Belcari and Castellano Castellani.

The sacred plays were not divided into acts, but the stage directions make it plain that scenes were changed. The dramas were not very artistic in structure. The story was set forth baldly and simply, and the language became stereotyped. The "success of the play," says Symonds, "depended on the movement of the story," and the attractions of the scenery, costumes and music."

Symonds describes at some length "Saint Uliva" and the interludes of Cecchi's "Esaltazione della Croce." The latter belongs to 1589, but it is almost certain that the manner of presentation was traditional. That similar splendors might have been exhibited in the

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fifteenth century we shall see later. Symonds thus describes the introduction to the "Esaltazione." A skilful architect turned the field of San Giovanni into a theater, covered with a red tent. The rising of the curtain showed Jacob asleep with his head resting on rocks, while he wore a shirt of fine linen and cloth of silver stockings and had costly furs thrown over him. As he slept the heavens opened and seven angels appeared sitting on clouds and making "a most pleasant noise with horns, greater and less viols, lutes and organ.

. . . The music of this and all the other interludes was the composition of Luca Bati, a man of this art most excellent." After this celestial music another part of the heavens opened and disclosed God the Father. A ladder was let down, and God leaning upon it "sang majestically to the sound of many instruments in a sonorous bass voice."

The other interludes were also filled with

scenic and musical effects. For instance one showed the ecstasy of David, dancing before the ark "to the sound of a large lute, a violin, a trombone, but more especially to his own harp." These references to the employment of many instruments in accompanying the voice or the dance make us wonder whether our historical stories of the birth and development of the orchestra are well grounded. But we shall have occasion to consider this matter more fully when we approach the study of the musical apparatus of the first lyric dramas. It may be noted, however, in passing that the Italian word "violino" was used as late as 1597 to designate the tenor viol. This instance of uncertainty in terminology warns us to be careful in accepting all things literally.

Perhaps what is of greater significance is the fact that there seems to have been more uniformity of effort and style in the first secular drama, doubtless owing to its great supe-

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riority as a piece of literary art. That sacred plays were seldom written by men of literary rank and ability we have already noted. That they were long drawn out, cumbersome, disjointed and quite without dramatic design has also been indicated. Their real significance as forerunners of opera lies in their insistent employment of certain materials, such as verse, music and spectacular action, which afterwards became essential parts of the machinery of the lyric drama.

Indeed in the profusion of spectacular interludes one finds much that resembles not only opera, but also the English masque and sometimes even the French pastoral. Yet close examination will convince any student of operatic history that almost every form of theatrical performance, from the choral dance to the most elaborate festival show, exerted a certain amount of influence on the hybrid product called opera. For example, between the acts

of "Saint Uliva," which required two days for its presentation, the "Masque of Hope" was given. The stage directions say: "You will cause three women, well beseen, to issue, one of them attired in white, one in red, the other in green, with golden balls in their hands, and with them a young man robed in white; and let him, after looking many times first on one and then on another of these damsels, at last stay still and say the following verses, gazing at her who is clad in green." The story of Echo and Narcissus was also enacted and the choir of nymphs which carried off the dead youth had a song beginning thus:

"Fly forth in bliss to heaven,  
Thou happy soul and fair."

On the other hand some few sacred plays showed skill in the treatment of character. The "Mary Magdalen" is one of these. The Magdalen is portrayed with power and even

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passion. But the general purpose of the sacred play, which was to instruct the populace in the stories of Bible history, precluded the exercise of high literary imagination. Fancy and the taste of the time seem to have governed the fashioning of these plays. Their historic importance thus becomes much larger than their artistic value. Their close approach to the character of early opera is beyond question.

## CHAPTER III

### BIRTHPLACE OF THE SECULAR DRAMA

**I**N the midst of more imposing chronicles bearing upon the growth of Italy the student of her history is likely to lose sight of the little Marquisate of Mantua. Yet its story is profoundly interesting and in its relations to the development of the lyric drama filled with significance. That it should have come to occupy such a high position among the cultivated centers of the Renaissance seems singularly appropriate since Virgil, the Italian literary deity of the period, was born at Pietole, now a suburb of Mantua.

The marquisate owed its elevation to the character of the great lords of the house of Gonzaga, who ruled it from 1328 to 1708. In

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the former year the head of the house ousted from the government the Buonacolsis, who had been masters since 1247. In 1432 the Gonzagas were invested with the hereditary title of Marquis and in 1530 Charles V raised the head of the house to the rank of Duke. When the last duke died without issue in 1708 Austria gained possession of the little realm.

Entangled in the ceaseless turmoil of wars between Milan and the forces allied against her, Mantua under the rule of the Gonzagas maintained her intellectual energy and played bravely her part in the revival of classic learning. Her court became a center of scholarship from which radiated a beneficent influence through much of northern Italy. The lords of Gonzaga fought and plotted, ate and drank, and plunged into the riotous dissipation and free play of passions which characterized the Renaissance period, but like other distinguished Italians they steeped themselves in



learning and were the proud patrons of artists, authors, teachers, composers.

The eminence of the house in scholarship doubtless dated from the reign of the Marchese Gian Francesco Gonzaga. This nobleman cherished a genuine love for ancient history and was not without an appreciation of Roman verse. Believing, as he did in common with most Italians, that the republican thought of Rome was the foundation of all exalted living, he realized that his children ought to be committed to the care of a master thoroughly schooled in ancient lore. He therefore invited to his court, in 1425, the distinguished scholar Vittorino da Feltre and gave the children entirely into his hands. A separate villa was allotted to the master and his pupils. This house had been a pleasure resort where the young Gonzagas and their friends had idled and feasted. Under Vittorino it was gradually transformed into a great

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school, for the Marquis was liberal enough to open its doors to students from various parts of Italy. The influence of the institution became far reaching and vital. The children of the Marquis, surrounded by earnest minds, by students often so poor that they had to be provided by their patron with clothes and food, but none the less respected in that little community of the intellect for their sincerity and their industry, could not fail to imbibe a deep reverence for learning and a keen and discriminating taste in art.

It is, then, in the natural order of things that Ludovico Gonzaga, one of the sons of Francesco and pupils of Vittorino, should have been proud to receive at his court the sycophantic and avaricious poet Filelfo, and to suffer under his systematic begging. He discharged his debt to the world of art with greater insight when in 1456 he invited to his court the great painter Mantegna. He of-

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ferred the artist a substantial salary and in 1460 the master went to reside at Mantua. He remained there under three successive marquises till his death in 1506. He enriched the little capital with splendid creations of his art, now unfortunately mostly destroyed. Mantegna's "Madonna della Vittoria," in the Louvre, was painted to celebrate the deeds of Francesco Gonzaga in the battle of Fornovo.

When he was ejected from Rome for making obscene pictures, Giulio Romano went to live at Mantua, and the city still bears the traces of his residence as well as of Mantegna's. The ducal palace, begun in 1302, contains five hundred rooms in many of which are paintings by Romano. The Palazzo Te is regarded by most authorities as Giulio's noblest monument, displaying, as it does, his skill as an architect, painter and sculptor. The Cathedral of San Pietro was restored from his designs and in the Church of San Andrea, in a

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tomb adorned by his pupils, sleeps the great Mantegna.

The history of music at the court of Mantua begins at least as early as the fourteenth century. Vander Straeten<sup>1</sup> found some record of a musician of the Gallo-Belgic school called Jean le Chartreux, or by the Italians Giovanni di Namur. He was the author of a "*Libellus Musicus*," preserved in the British Museum. He was born at Namur; learned singing, and according to Vander Straeten, studied the works of Boethius under Vittorino da Feltre in Italy. He cites Marchetto of Padua as the first to write in the chromatic manner since Boethius. Bertolotti in his searching examination<sup>2</sup> of the records of Mantua found numerous names of musicians employed at the court or permitted to exercise

<sup>1</sup> "*La Musique aux Pays-Bas avant le XIX Siècle*," Edmond Vander Straeten. Brussels, 1867-1888.

<sup>2</sup> "*Musici alla Corte dei Gonzaga in Mantova dal Secolo XV al XVIII*," per A. Bertolotti. Milan.

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their calling within the boundaries of the marquise. He notes the predominance of Flemish masters and the supremacy of their ideas in the music of Italy. He attributes to Vittorino da Feltre the introduction of the systematic study of music and credits him with publicly teaching the art and inspiring in some measure the treatise of Jean le Chartreux. From Bertolotti we learn that Maestro Rodolfo de Alemannia, an organist, and German, living in Mantua, obtained in 1435 certain privileges in the construction of organs for six years.

From this time forward we find music and musicians in high favor at the court of Mantua. Neither Vander Straeten nor Bertolotti succeeded in obtaining from the archives of the city more than fragmentary mention of musicians of whom we would gladly know more. Nevertheless there is sufficient to demonstrate the interest of the marquises in

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the art and the frequency with which musical entertainment was provided.

Toward the end of 1458 Germans became more numerous among the musicians at Mantua, though they do not appear at any time to have held a commanding position. This is quite natural since at that period German musicians had no school of their own, but with the rest of the world were followers of the Flemings. In 1458 Barbara of Brandenburg, Marchioness of Mantua, took from Ferrara Marco and Giovanni Peccenini, who were of German birth. Two years later the Marquis, wishing to engage a master of singing for his son, sent to one Nicolo, the German, at Ferrara, and this musician recommended Giovanni Brith as highly qualified to sing in the latest fashion the best songs of the Venetian style.

Ludovico, who has already been mentioned and who was the marquis from 1444 to 1478,

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had for two years at his court the celebrated Franchino Gaffori. This master, born near Lodi in 1451, was the son of one Betino, a soldier. The boy went into the church in childhood and studied ecclesiastical music under a Carmelite monk named Johannis Godendach. Later, he went to Mantua, where his father was in the service of the Marquis. "Here for two years he closely applied himself day and night to study, during which time he composed many tracts on the theory and practice of music."<sup>1</sup> The period of Gaffori's greatest achievements in theoretical work, especially his noted "*Practica Musicae*," from which Hawkins quotes copiously, was later than his residence at Mantua, but his studies at that court at least betoken the existence of a congenial atmosphere, and we may be assured that such an enlightened ama-

<sup>1</sup> "A General History of the Science and Practice of Music," by Sir John Hawkins. London, 1776.

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teur as Ludovico did not neglect opportunities to acquaint himself with the workings of this studious mind.

Bertolotti reproduces sundry interesting letters which passed between the courts of Ferrara and Mantua and dealt with musical matters. Perhaps an epistle from the Duke of Milan in January, 1473, might cause a passing smile of amusement, for in it the Duke confides to the Mantuan Marquis a project for the revival of music in Italy. It seems that he was weary of the long reign of the Flemings, and was sending to Rome for the best musicians with the purpose of founding an orchestra so that composers and singers would be attracted to his court. But as this fine project had no direct bearing on the history of the lyric drama we may permit it to pass without further examination.

However far we may follow the extracts from the archives of Mantua in the fifteenth



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century, we get nothing definite in regard to the production of the first Italian secular and lyric drama at that court. We are driven into the hazardous realm of conjecture as to the relations between its production and the prominent musicians who formed part of the suite of the Marquis. This indeed is but natural, since it could not be expected of the Marquis and his associates that they should know they were making history.

We learn that in 1481 Gian Pietro della Viola, a Florentine by birth, accompanied Clara Gonzaga when she became the Duchess of Montpensier and that he returned to Mantua in 1484 — the year after “Orfeo” was probably produced. We learn that he composed the music for the ballerino, Lorenzo Lavagnolo, who returned to Mantua in 1485 after having been since 1479 in the service of the Duchess Bona of Savoy. We are at least free to conjecture that before 1479 Lavagnolo

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trained the chorus of Mantua in dancing so that he may have contributed something to the ballata which we shall at the proper place see as a number in Poliziano's "Orfeo."

Travel between the courts of Mantua and Ferrara was not unfamiliar to musicians, and there is reason to believe that those of the former court often sought instruction from those of the latter. For example, it is on record that Gian Andrea di Alessandro, who became organist to the Marquis of Mantua in 1485, was sent in 1490 to Ferrara that he might "learn better song and playing the organ from Girolamo del Bruno." In 1492 he was sufficiently instructed to be sent by the Marquis to San Benedetto to play for the ambassador from Venice to Milan.

The celebrated composer of frottole, Bartolomeo Tromboncino, was for some time in the service of the Mantuan court. It was formerly believed that he went to Mantua in

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1494, but Signor Bertolotti unearthed a document which showed that his father was engaged there in 1487. From which the learned Italian investigator reached the conclusion that the young Tromboncino was with his parent. It seems to be pretty well established that the two went together to Venice in 1495.

But he returned to Mantua and for many years passed some of his time at that court and some at Ferrara. For example, we learn that in 1497 the Cardinal d'Este promised the Marchioness of Mantua that she should have some new compositions by Tromboncino. Yet in 1499 he was sent with other musicians of the suite of the Gonzagas to Vincenza to sing a vesper service in some church. It appears that Tromboncino was not only a composer, but an instrumental musician and a singer.

These fragmentary references to the activ-

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ities of Tromboncino at the court of Mantua are indeed unsatisfactory, but they are about all that are within our reach. That he was born at Verona and that he was one of the most popular composers of the latter end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century and that his special field of art was the frottola are almost the sum total of the story of his career. We know that he wrote two sacred songs in the frottola style, nine "Lamentations" and one "Benedictus" for three voices. Petrucci's nine books of frottole (Venice, 1509) contain all of Tromboncino's.

Carlo Delaunasy, a singer in the service of Isabella, Marchioness of Mantua in 1499, and Marco Carra, director of music to the Marquis in 1503, 1514 and 1525, are among the names unearthed from the archives of Mantua by their keeper at the request of Mr. Vander Straeten. These papers contained the

names of a few other singers, players and directors, but their inadequacy was demonstrated by the fact that they contained no mention of Jacques de Wert, a composer of great activity and talent, to whom Vander Straeten devotes some fifteen pages of his exhaustive work.

De Wert was born in Flanders near the end of the first half of the sixteenth century. While yet a child he was a choir boy in the service of Maria de Cardona, Marchesa della Padulla. Subsequently he entered the service of Count Alfonso of Novellara and in 1558 he published a book of madrigals which attracted widespread attention. Ten years later we find him at the court of Mantua, where his happiness was destroyed by the conduct of his wife. He appealed for aid to the Duke of Ferrara and the result appears to have been a dual service, for while he remained at Mantua he wrote much for the other court. His

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distinguished "Concerto Maggiore" for fifty-seven singers was written for some state festival.

His service at Ferrara, whither he often went, enticed him into a relationship with Tarquinia Molza, a poet and court lady, which caused her to go into retirement. De Wert continued to live in Mantua and his last book of madrigals was published in Venice, September 10, 1591. He must have died soon afterward. Between 1558 and 1591 he put forth ten books of madrigals, generally for five voices, though toward the end he sometimes composed for six or seven. He was the author also of some motets, and Luca Marenzio, who brought the madrigal style to its most beautiful development and whose influence molded the methods of the English glee and madrigal writers, is believed to have been his pupil for a short time. Marenzio unquestionably lived for some months in Mantua,

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where according to Calvi<sup>1</sup> he completed his studies under the guidance of the Duke.

Of Alessandro Striggio and his art work at the court of Mantua and elsewhere special mention will be made in another part of this work. Moreover it is not necessary that anything should be said here of the epoch-making creations of Claudio Monteverde, who was long in the Gonzaga service and who produced his "Orfeo" at Mantua. Sufficient has been set forth in this chapter to give some estimate of the importance and activity of Mantua as a literary and musical center. The culture of the age was confined almost exclusively to churchmen, professors, literary laborers and the nobility. The long line of musical and dramatic development followed at Mantua had no relation to the general art life of the Italian people. But its importance

<sup>1</sup> "Scena Letteraria degli Scrittori Bergamaschi," per Donato Calvi. Bergamo, 1664.

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in its preparation for the birth of the art form finally known as opera is not easily overestimated, especially when we remember that this form did not become a public entertainment till 1637. It was at Mantua that Angelo Poliziano's "Orfeo," the first lyric drama with a secular subject, was produced, and it must be our next business to examine this work and set forth the conditions under which it was made known.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE ARTISTIC IMPULSE

THE non-existence of the drama in the Middle Ages is one of the strikingly significant deficiencies of the period. The illiterate condition of the people, and even of the nobility, the fragmentary state of governments, the centralizing of small and dependent communities around the feet of petty tyrants, the frequency of wars large and small, and the devotion of men to skill in the use of arms, made it impossible that attention should be bestowed upon so polite and sedentary a form of amusement as the drama.

It is generally held that the church made the first movement toward the abolition of the drama by placing its ban on the plays handed

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down from the Greeks and the Romans, partly because of their inculcation of reverence for heathen deities and partly because of the shameless indecencies which had invaded them. But this could have been only one of many causes which operated in keeping the play out of Europe for so many centuries. When it was revived, as we have seen, in the form of the liturgical drama and afterward of the sacred representation, it bore little or no resemblance to the splendid art product bequeathed to the world by the Greeks.

The sudden and glorious return of the dramatic subjects of the Greeks to the stage of medieval Europe marks the beginning of the modern era. When the Italians turned to the stories of ancient fable for material for their secular drama they were without doubt quite unconscious of the importance of the step they were taking. It is only the reflective eye of retrospective study that can discern all the

significant elements happily combined in this event by the overmastering laws of human progress.

To enter into a detailed examination of the matter would demand of us a review of the whole movement known as the Renaissance. This, however, is not essential to an appreciation of the precise nature of the step from the sacred representation to the lyric drama and its importance in laying the foundations of opera. This momentous step was taken late in the fifteenth century with the performance of Angelo Poliziano's "Favola di Orfeo" at the Court of Mantua to celebrate the return of the Cardinal Gonzaga. The Italian authorities are by no means agreed as to the importance of this production. Rossi says:<sup>1</sup>

"The circle of plot in the religious drama, at first restricted to the life of Christ, had been

<sup>1</sup> "Storia della Letteratura Italiana." Milan, 1905.

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gradually broadened. Some writers, wishing to adapt attractive themes to the aristocratic gatherings of the princely courts, availed themselves of the very form of the sacred drama of the people in the treatment of subjects entirely profane. Thus did Poliziano, whose 'Orfeo,' as the evident reproduction of that form in a mythological subject is an isolated type in the history of the Italian drama."

Alessandro D'Ancona<sup>1</sup> in his monumental work on the sources of the Italian play says:

"The 'Favola di Orfeo,' although it drew its argument from mythology, was hardly dissimilar in its intrinsic character from the sacred plays, and was moreover far from that second form of tragedy which was later given to it, not by the author himself, but probably by Tebaldeo, to serve the dramatic tastes of Ferrara. So then the 'Fable of Orpheus' is a prelude, a passage, an attempt at the transformation of the dramatic spectacle so dear to the people, and while it detaches itself in subject from the religious tradition, it is not yet

<sup>1</sup> "Origini del Teatro in Italia." Firenze, 1877.

involved in the meshes of classic imitation. If, indeed, from the stage setting and from the music introduced into it, it is already an artistic spectacle, it cannot be called an example of ancient art restored. It was a theatrical ornament to a prince's festival."

Perhaps both of these admirable Italian authors had their eyes too closely fixed on the spoken drama to perceive the immense significance of Poliziano's "Orfeo" in the field of opera. If they had paused for a moment to consider that Peri and Caccini chose the same story for the book of their operas, in which the musical departure was even more significant than the dramatic innovation of Poliziano had been, that Monteverde utilized the same theme in his epoch-making "Orfeo," and that for nearly two centuries the poetic and musical suggestiveness of the Orpheus legend made it hold its grip on the affections of composers, they might have realized bet-

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ter the relative value of the achievement of Poliziano.

Let us then briefly review the influences which led to the selection of the subject and the character of its literary investiture by the Italian poet. The nature of the music and the manner of performance will have to be examined separately. The transformation which came upon Italian life and thought under the influence of the revival of the study of ancient literature and philosophy has been extensively examined in numerous works. But at this point we must recall at least the particular effect which it had on Italian poetry. The creations of Dante might seem to us tremendous enough in themselves to have originated an era, but as a matter of fact they marked the conclusion of one. They were the full and final fruition of medieval thought, and after them Italian literature entered upon a new movement.

Petrarch was the father of the revival of ancient literature. Not only was he himself a profound student of it, but he suggested to Boccaccio that line of study which governed the entire intellectual life of the author of the "Decameron." With the application of Boccaccio to the translation of Homer into Latin we perceive a singular illustration of the trend of the classic devotion of the time. Despite the fact that the "Divina Commedia" had magnificently demonstrated the beauty of Italian as a literary medium, fourteenth century scholars regarded the language with contempt. Pride in their connection with historic Rome, as well as the environment of places associated with his personality, made Virgil their literary deity. The ancient language of the eternal city and of the "Æneid" was for them the only suitable literary instrument. That they played upon it as amateurs seems never to have occurred to them. The

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study of Greek which followed the activities of Petrarch was at first confined to a narrow circle and it never spread far beyond the limits of university walls. But the study of Greek thought and ideals, as obtained from the ancient works, speedily found its way through the entire society of cultivated Italians. The people had their own poets and their own songs, but the aristocracy, which was highly cultivated, plunged into the contemplation of Grecian art. The influence of all this on Italian literature was deep and significant.

But there were other significant facts in the history of this era. Italy was not yet a nation. She had no central point of fixture and no system of radiation. She was divided into a group of small centers, each with its own dominating forces. Naples was unlike Rome; Florence was unlike Venice; Milan was different from all. Each had its characteristics, yet all had points of similarity.



All were steeped in the immorality of the age, and all embarked with equal enthusiasm in the pursuit of classic learning. The strange combination of physical vice with intellectual appetite produced throughout Italy what Symonds has happily called an "esthetic sensuality." The Italian's intellectual pursuits satisfied a craving quite sensuous in its nature.

It is not at all astonishing that in these conditions we find no national epic and no national drama, but a gradual growth of a poetry saturated with physical realism and the final appearance of a dramatic form equipped with the most potent charms of sensuous art. It was in such a period that a special kind of public was developed. The "Cortegiano" of Castiglione, Bembo's "Asolani," the "Camaldolese Discourses" of Landino could have been addressed only to social oligarchies standing on a basis of polite culture.

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In such conditions the stern ideals of early Christianity were thrust into obscurity and the sensuous charms of a hybrid paganism, a bastard child of ancient Greece and medieval Italy herself, excited the desires of scholars and dilettanti from the lagoons of Venice to the Bay of Naples. In the midst of this era it is not remarkable that we hear the pipe of Pan, slightly out of tune and somewhat clogged by artifice, as it was later in the day of Rousseau, but none the less playing the ancient hymns to Nature and the open air life.

Jacopo Sannazzaro (1458-1530) embodied the ideals of the time in his "Arcadia," in which Symonds finds the literary counterparts of the frescoes of Gozzo and Lippo Lippi. At any rate the poem contains the whole apparatus of nymphs and satyrs transplanted to Italian landscape and living a life of commingled Hellenism and Italianism. The eloquence of

Sannazzaro is that of the Arcadian the world over. He sighs and weeps and calls upon dryads, hamadryads and oreads to pity his consuming passion. When he sees his mistress she is walking in the midst of pastoral scenes where satyrs lurk behind every bush and the song of the shepherd is heard in the land. Sannazzaro's "Arcadia" was the inspiration of Sir Philip Sidney's. It was a natural outburst of the time and it conveys perfectly the spirit of Italian imaginative thought in a period almost baffling in the complexity of its character.

It was not strange that in such a time Italian poets should have discerned in Orpheus the embodiment of their own ideals. There is no evidence that the Italians of the fifteenth century knew (or at any rate considered) the true meaning of the Orpheus myth. Of its relation to the Sun myth and of Euridice as the dawn they give no hint. To them Or-

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pheus was the embodiment of the Arcadian idea. He was the singer of the hymns that woke all nature to life. For him the satyr capered and the coy nymph came bridling from her retreat, the woods became choral and the streams danced in the sunlight to the magic of his pipe. This was the poetic phase of the general trend of human thought at the time. The philosophers began by questioning the authority of dogma. Next they turned for instruction to the ancients, and finally they interrogated nature. In the course of their development they revolted against the deadening rule of the church and claimed for the human mind the right to reason independently. The scientific investigation of natural phenomena followed almost inevitably and the demonstrations of Giordano Bruno and Galileo shook the foundations of the church.

In the field of polite literature men turned to nature for their laws of daily life and be-

lived that in the pastoral kingdom of Theocritus they had found the promised land. Inevitably it followed that the figure of Orpheus, singing through the earth, and bringing under his dominion the beast and the bird, the very trees and stones, should become the picture of their fondest dreams. He was the hero of Arcady "where all the leaves are merry." In his presence the dust of dry theology and the cruel ban of the church against the indulgence of human desires were impossible. From solemn ecclesiastic prose the world was turned to happy pagan song. The very music of the church went out into the world and became earthly in the madrigals of love. The miter and the stole gave way to the buskin and the pack; and the whole dreamland of Italy peopled itself with wandering singers wooing nymphs or shepherdesses in landscapes that would have fired the imagination of a Turner.

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And withal the dramatic embodiment of this conception was prepared as a court spectacle for the enjoyment of fashionable society. Thus we find ourselves in the presence of conditions not unlike those which produced the tomfooleries of the court of Louis XVI and the musettes, bergerettes and aubades of French song.

The production of Poliziano's "Orfeo" may not have seemed to its contemporaries to possess an importance larger than that which Rossi and D'Ancona attribute to it; but its proper position in musical history is at the foundation of the modern opera. Poetically it was the superior of any lyric work, except perhaps those of Metastasio. Musically it was radically different in character from the opera, as it was from the liturgical drama. But none the less it contained some of the germs of the modern opera. It had its solo, its chorus and its

ballet.<sup>1</sup> But while the characters of these were almost as clearly defined as they are in Gluck's "Orfeo," their musical basis, as we shall see, was altogether different. Nevertheless it was distinctly lyric and secular and was therefore as near the spirit of the popular music of the time as any new attempt could well approach. It had, too, in embryonic form all that apparatus for the enchantment of the sense and the beguilement of the intellect which in the following century was the chief attraction of a lyric drama, partly opera, partly spectacle and partly ballet.

<sup>1</sup> George Hogarth, in his "Memoirs of the Musical Drama," London, 1838, declares that this "Orfeo" was sung throughout, but he offers no ground for his assertion, which must be taken as a mere conjecture based on the character of the text. Dr. Burney, in his "General History of Music," makes a similar assertion, but does not support it.

## CHAPTER V

### POLIZIANO'S "FAVOLA DI ORFEO"

**I**N the year 1472 the Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga, who had stayed long in Bologna, returned to Mantua. He was received with jubilant celebrations. There were banquets, processions and public rejoicings. It would have been quite unusual if there had been no festival play of some kind. It is uncertain whether Poliziano's "Orfeo" was written for this occasion, but there seems to be a fair amount of reason for believing that it was. At any rate it could not have been produced later than 1483, for we know it was made in honor of this Cardinal and that he died in that year.

If the "Orfeo" was played in 1472 it must have been written when its author was no



more than eighteen years of age. But even at that age he was already famous. He was born in Montepulciano on July 14, 1454. The family name was Ambrogini, but from the Latinized name of his native town turned into Italian he constructed the title of Poliziano, by which he was afterward known. At the age of ten he was sent to Florence, then governed by Lorenzo de Medici. He studied under the famous Greeks Argyropoulos and Kallistos and the equally famous Italians, Landino and Ficino.<sup>1</sup> Gifted with precocious

<sup>1</sup> John Argyropoulos, who was born at Constantinople in 1416, was one of the first teachers of Greek in Italy, where he was long a guest of Palla degli Strozzi at Padua. In 1456 he went to Florence, where Cosimo de Medici's son and grandson were among his pupils. He spent fifteen years in Florence and thence went to Rome. To this master, George Gemistos and George Trapezuntios, the acquisition of Greek knowledge at Florence in the fifteenth century was chiefly due. It should be particularly noted that all of them went to Italy before the fall of the Greek empire in 1453. Andronicus Kallistos was one of the popular lecturers of the time and one of the first Greeks to visit France. Cristoforo Landino, one of the famous coterie of intellectual men associated with Lorenzo de Medici, took the chair of rhetoric and

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talent, he wrote at the age of sixteen, astonishing epigrams in Latin and Greek. At seventeen he began to translate the "Iliad" into Latin hexameters, and his success with the second book attracted the attention of Lorenzo himself. Poliziano was now known as the "Homeric youth." It was not long before he was hailed the king of Italian scholars and the literary genius of his time. When he was but thirty he became professor of Greek and Latin in the University of Florence, and drew to his feet students from all parts of Europe. John Reuchlin hastened from Germany, William Grocyn from the shades of Oxford, and from the same seat of learning the mighty Thomas Linacre, later to found the

poetry at Florence in 1454. He paid especial attention in his lectures to the Italian poets, and in 1481 published an edition of Dante. His famous "Camaldolese Discussions," modeled in part on Cicero's "Tusculan Disputations," is well known to students of Italian literature. Marsilio Ficino was a philosopher, and his chief aim was a reconciliation of ancient philosophy with Christianity.

Royal College of Physicians. Lorenzo's sons, Piero and Giovanni, were for a time his pupils, but their mother took them away. Poliziano was as vicious as the typical men of his time and the prudent Clarice knew it.

Dwelling in a villa at Fiesole, provided for him by Lorenzo, Poliziano occupied his life with teaching and writing, occasionally paying visits to other cities. In 1492 Lorenzo passed away and Poliziano wrote an elegy which is to this day regarded as unique in modern Latin verse. In 1494 the famous scholar followed his patron, even while Savonarola was setting Italy in a ferment of passionate religious reaction against the poetic and sensuous paganism infused into the thought of their time by Poliziano and Lorenzo. The scholar was laid in San Marco and they set upon his tomb this epitaph: "Here lies the angel who had one head, and what is new, three tongues."

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This is not the place for a discussion of Poliziano's importance in literature, but it is essential that we should understand the significance of his achievement in the "Orfeo." The philosophic and poetic spirit of the period and of this poem has already been discussed. But we may not dismiss the subject without noting that Poliziano powerfully forwarded the impulse toward the employment of Italian as a literary vehicle. Too many of the Italian humanists had preferred Latin, and had looked down upon the native language as uncouth and fit only for the masses. But when the authority of Poliziano was thrown upon the side of Italian and when he made such a triumphant demonstration of its beauties in his "Stanze" and his "Orfeo," he carried conviction to all the writers of his country.

According to Poliziano's own statement he wrote the "Orfeo" at the request of the Cardinal of Mantua in the space of two days,

## Poliziano's "Favola di Orfeo" 73

"among continual disturbances, and in the vulgar tongue, that it might be the better comprehended by the spectators." It was his opinion that this creation would bring him more shame than honor. There are only 434 lines in the "Orfeo" and therefore the feat of writing it in two days was no great one for a man of Poliziano's ability.

Sismondi<sup>1</sup> regards this work as an eclogue rather than a drama. He says: "The universal homage paid to Virgil had a decided influence on the rising drama. The scholars were persuaded that this cherished poet combined in himself all the different kinds of excellence; and as they created a drama before they possessed a theater, they imagined that dialogue rather than action, was the essence of the dramatic art. The *Buccolics* appeared to them a species of comedies or tragedies,

<sup>1</sup> "Historical View of the Literature of the South of Europe," by J. C. L. Simonde de Sismondi, translated by Thomas Roscoe. London, 1895.

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less animated it is true, but more poetical than the dramas of Terence and of Seneca, or perhaps of the Greeks. They attempted indeed to unite these two kinds, to give interest by action to the tranquil reveries of the shepherds, and to preserve a pastoral charm in the more violent expression of passion. The Orpheus, though divided into five acts, though mingled with chorus, and terminating with a tragic incident, is still an eclogue rather than a drama."

Sismondi's perception of the survival of the pastoral character in this new form of entertainment is something we can appreciate, for this character has survived all the experiments made on the "Orfeo" legend and it dominates even the epoch-making work of Gluck.

Symonds, who had a broader view of art than Sismondi, had no difficulty in perceiving that the true genius of this new drama was lyric. He says: "To do the 'Orfeo' jus-

tice we ought to have heard it with its own accompaniment of music." He enlarges upon the failure of the author to seize the opportunity to make much of the really tragic moment in the play, namely that expressing the frenzied grief of Orfeo over the loss of Euridice. Yet, he notes, "when we return from these criticisms to the real merit of the piece, we find in it a charm of musical language, a subtlety of musical movement, which are irresistibly fascinating. Thought and feeling seem alike refined to a limpidity that suits the flow of melody in song. The very words evaporate and lose themselves in floods of sound." Surely, here is the description of an ideal opera book.

Two editions of the play are known and both are published in a volume edited by Carducci.<sup>1</sup> The first version is that originally

<sup>1</sup> "Le Stanze, l'Orfeo e le Rime di Messer Angelo Abrogini Poliziano," per Giosue Carducci. Firenze, 1863.

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printed in 1494 and reprinted frequently up to 1776. In the latter year the second version was brought out by Padre Ireneo Affo at Venice. This was in all probability a revision of the poem by Poliziano. In this version the division into five acts is noted and there are additional poetic passages of great beauty. It may be worth a note in passing that in 1558 a version of the "Orfeo" in octave stanzas was published for the use of the common people and that as late as 1860 it continued to be printed from time to time for the use of the Tuscan contadini.

The main movement of Poliziano's poem is intrusted to the traditional octave stanza, but we find passages of terza rima. There are also choral passages which suggest the existence of the frottola, the carnival song and the ballata. The play is introduced by Mercury acting as prologue. This was in accordance with time honored custom which called for an "an-



nouncer of the festival." The first scene is between Mopsus, an old shepherd, and Aristæus, a young one. Aristæus, after the manner of shepherds, has seen a nymph, and has become desperately enamored. Mopsus shakes his head and bids the young man beware. Aristæus says that his nymph loves melody. He urges Mopsus :

" Forth from thy wallet take thy pipe and we  
Will sing awhile beneath the leafy trees ;  
For well my nymph is pleased with melody."

Now follows a number which the author calls a " canzona " — song. The first stanza of the Italian text will serve to show the form.

" Udite, selve, mie dolce parole,  
Poi che la ninfa mia udir non vole.  
La bella ninfa e sorda al mio lamento  
E'l suon di nostra fistula non cura :  
Di cio si lagna il mio cornuto armento,  
Ne vuol bagnare il grifo in acqua pura  
Ne vuol toccar la tenera verdura ;  
Tanto del suo pastor gl'incresce e dole."

The two introductory lines preface each stanza. This first one is thus translated by

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Symonds,<sup>1</sup> whose English version is here used throughout.

“Listen, ye wild woods, to my roundelay;  
Since the fair nymph will hear not, though I pray.

The lovely nymph is deaf to my lament,  
Nor heeds the music of this rustic reed;  
Wherefore my flocks and herds are ill content,  
Nor bathe the hoof where grows the water weed,  
Nor touch the tender herbage on the mead;  
So sad because their shepherd grieves are they.”

There are four stanzas. The nymph who has bewitched Aristæus is Euridice and the second scene shows us the shepherd pursuing her. It appears that in trying to escape from the shepherd she was bitten by a deadly snake, for in the third scene a dryad tells the story of the tragedy to her sisters. In the first edition, “dei codici chigiano e Riccardiano,” the next scene introduces Orpheus, who sings a song with Latin text beginning thus:

<sup>1</sup> In “Sketches and Studies in Italy,” pp. 217-224.

## Poliziano's "Favola di Orfeo" 79

"O meos longum modulata lusus  
Quos amor primam docuit juventam,  
Flecte nunc mecum numeros novumque  
Dic, lyra, carmen."

The most significant matter connected with this scene in the early version of the poem is the stage direction, which reads thus: "Orfeo cantando sopra il monte in su la lira e seguente versi latini fu interotto da un pastore nunciatore della morte di Euridice." The name of the actor of Orfeo is mentioned as Baccio Ugolino. This stage "business" in English reads: "Orpheus singing on the hill to his lyre the following Latin verses is interrupted by a shepherd announcing the death of Euridice." Thirteen verses of the song are given before the entrance of the shepherd, and immediately after the announcement Orpheus descends into Hades. In the Padre Affo's later version of the work this song of Orpheus does not appear, but a dryad announces to her sisters the death of Euridice and then follows a chorus:

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“L’Aria di pianti s’oda risuonare,  
Che d’ ogni luce e priva:  
E al nostro lagrimare  
Crescano i fiumi al colmo della riva —”

The refrain, “l’aria di pianti” is repeated at the end of each stanza. At the conclusion of this chorus the dryads leave the stage. Orpheus enters singing a Latin stanza of four lines beginning:

“Musa, triumphales titulos et gesta canamus  
Herculis.”

In Padre Affo’s edition it is at this point that a dryad tells Orpheus of Euridice’s death. Mnesillus, a satyr, mocks him. The hero now sings in the vernacular:

“Ora piangiamo, O sconsolata lyra,” etc.  
“Let us lament, O lyre disconsolate:  
Our wonted music is in tune no more.”

The story now moves similarly in both editions. Orpheus determines to descend to Hades to try to move the infernal powers “with tearful songs and words of honey’d

woe." He remembers that he has moved stones and turned the flowing streams. He proceeds at once to the iron gates and raises his song. Pluto demands to know

"What man is he who with his golden lyre  
Hath moved the gates that never move,  
While the dead folk repeat his dirge of love."

These words leave no doubt that Orpheus sang. Even Proserpine, the spouse of Pluto, confesses to her lord that she feels the new stirrings of sympathy. She desires to hear more of this wondrous song. Now Orpheus sings in octave stanzas. The last stanza of his song is thus translated by Symonds:

"I pray not to you by the waves forlorn  
Of marshy Styx or dismal Acheron,  
By Chaos, where the mighty world was born,  
Or by the sounding flames of Phlegethon;  
But by the fruit that charmed thee on that morn  
When thou didst leave our world for this dread throne!  
O queen, if thou reject this pleading breath,  
I will no more return, but ask for death."

Pluto yields up Euridice according to the well-known condition that Orpheus keep silence

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and look not back till out of Hades. The poet again sings four Latin lines and with his bride starts for the upper world. The catastrophe is treated in much the same manner as it has been in subsequent versions of the story. Euridice disappears. Orpheus is about to turn back, but he is stopped by Tisiphone. He then breaks into virulent railery, swears he 'll never love woman more and advises all husbands to seek divorce. All this is in resounding octave rime. Then a Mænad calls upon her sisters to defend their sex. They drive Orpheus off the stage and slay him. Returning they sing a chorus, which is the finale of the opera.

“ Ciascun segua, O Bacco, te;  
Bacco, Bacco, oé, oé!  
Di corimbi e di verd'edere  
Cinto il capo abbiám così  
Per servirti a tuo richiedere  
Festeggiando notte e di.  
Ognun breva: Bacco e qui:  
E lasciate bere a me.  
Ciascun segua, O Bacco, te.”

Poliziano's "Favola di Orfeo" 83

This chorus is translated by Symonds. The first stanza, above given in the original Italian, is translated thus:

"Bacchus! we must all follow thee!  
Bacchus! Bacchus! Ohe! Ohe!

With ivy coronals, bunch and berry,  
Crown we our heads to worship thee!  
Thou hast bidden us to make merry  
Day and night with jollity!  
Drink then! Bacchus is here! Drink free,  
And hand ye the drinking cup to me!  
Bacchus! Bacchus! we must all follow thee!  
Bacchus! Bacchus! Ohe! Ohe!"

This is a sketch of the poem of Poliziano, on a story which became the subject of many operas, down to the time of Gluck. This is the story set by Monteverde in his famous work, which has recently been revived in Italy with success. This story was utilized by Peri and Caccini in their "Euridice," which is accepted as the first opera written in the new representative style of the sixteenth century to receive a public performance.

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But, as we have already noted, in this "Orfeo," performed at the Mantuan court, there was so much of the material of a genuine lyric drama that it now becomes our business to examine more closely the character of the musical features and the manner of the performance. The points at which music must have been heard are clearly indicated by the text. Before proceeding to a consideration of this music, let us picture to ourselves how the work was performed.



## CHAPTER VI

### THE PERFORMANCE OF "ORFEO"

THE "Orfeo" was performed in a hall of the castle. The lyric dramas of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were all presented in private. There were no opera houses, and the theater, though revived in Italy in the fifteenth century, had no permanency till Alfonso I, Duke of Ferrara, at the suggestion of Ariosto built in his capital a real play house. There is nevertheless no reason to think that the performance of Poliziano's "Orfeo" lacked admirable scenic and histrionic features. We have already seen how skilful the Italian managers and mechanics of spectacular sacred plays were in preparing brilliant scenic effects for their productions.

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Since the form and general apparatus of the sacred play were seized by Poliziano for the fashioning of his "Orfeo," it is altogether probable that he accepted from the earlier creation pregnant suggestions as to the manner of presentation.

However, as the "Orfeo" was to be given indoors the manner of exhibiting it had to differ somewhat from that of the open air spectacle. The scale of the picture had to be reduced and the use of large movement relinquished. A temporary stage was erected in the great hall of the Palazzo Gonzaga. A single setting sufficed for the pictorial investiture of the action. The stage was divided into two parts. One side represented the Thracian country, with its streams and mountains and its browsing flocks. The other represented the inferno with Pluto, Proserpine, and the other personages made familiar by classic literature. Between the two was a partition

## The Performance of "Orfeo" 87

and at the rear of the inferno were the iron gates.<sup>1</sup>

One easily realizes the vivid potency of the picture when Baccio Ugolino, as Orpheus, clad in a flowing robe of white, with a fillet around his head, a "golden" lyre in one hand and the "plectrum" in the other, appeared at the iron gates, and, striking the strings of the sweet sounding instrument, assailed the stony hearts of the infernals with song as chaste and yet as persuasive as that of Gluck himself. It is no difficult task to conjure up the scene, to see the gorgeously clad courtiers and ladies bending forward in their seats and hanging upon the accents of this gifted and accomplished performer of their day.

Of the history of Baccio Ugolino little, if anything, is known. There was a Ugolino of Orvieto, who flourished about the beginning

<sup>1</sup> "Florentia: Uomini e cose del Quattrocento," by Isidoro del Lungo.

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of the fifteenth century. He was archpriest of Ferrara, and appears to have written a theoretical work on music in which he set forth a great deal of the fundamental matter afterward utilized in the writings of Tinctoris. But whether this learned man was a member of the same family as Baccio Ugolino is not known. The fact that he was located at Ferrara makes it seem likely that he was related to Poliziano's interpreter, who might thus have belonged to a musical family.

At any rate Baccio Ugolino possessed some skill in improvisation, and was also accomplished in the art of singing and accompanying himself upon the lute or viol. We shall in another place in this work examine the methods of the lutenists and singers of the fifteenth century in adapting polyphonic compositions to delivery by a single voice with accompaniment of an instrument. It was in

## The Performance of "Orfeo" 89

this manner of singing that Baccio Ugolino was an expert. Symonds goes so far in one passage as to hint that Ugolino composed the music for Poliziano's "Orfeo," but there seems to be no ground whatever for such a conclusion.

Baccio Ugolino was without doubt one of those performers who appeared in the dramatic scenes and processional representations of the outdoor spectacles already reviewed. His pleasing voice, his picturesque appearance, grace of bearing and elegance of gesture, together with his ability to play his own accompaniments, marked him as the ideal impersonator of the Greek poet, and accordingly Poliziano secured his services for this important part.

For the other rôles and for the chorus the numerous singers of the court were sufficient. That there was an organized orchestra must be doubted, yet there may have been in-

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strumental accompaniments in certain passages. This also is a matter into which we shall further inquire when we take up a detailed examination of the musical means at the command of Poliziano and his musical associates. The study of this entire matter calls for care and judgment, for it is involved in a mass of misinformation, lack of any information and ill grounded conclusions. For example, we read in a foot-note of Rolland's excellent work<sup>1</sup> that in March, 1518, the "Suppositi" of Ariosto was performed at the Vatican before Pope Leo with musical intermezzi. The author quotes from a letter of Pauluzo, envoy of the Duke of Ferrara, written on March 8. He wrote: "The comedy was recited and well acted, and at the end of each act there was an intermezzo with fifes, bag-pipes, two cornets, some viols,

<sup>1</sup> "Histoire de l'Opera en Europe avant Lully et Scarlatti," par Romain Rolland. Paris, 1895.

## The Performance of "Orfeo" 91

some lutes and a small organ with a variety of tone. There was at the same time a flute and a voice which pleased much. There was also a concert of voices which did not come off quite so well, in my opinion, as other parts of the music."

Upon this passage Rolland makes the following comment: "This is the type of piece performed in Italy up to Vecchi, as the 'Orfeo' of Poliziano (1475), The Conversion of Saint Paul (Rome, 1484-92, music by Beverini), Cephale et Aurore (music by Nicolo de Coreggio) 1487, Ferrara, etc."

This confusion of Poliziano's "Orfeo" with spoken drama interspersed with intermezzi is unfortunate. There were no intermezzi at the representation of this lyric drama. It was in itself an entire novelty and nothing was done to distract the attention of the audience from its poetic and musical beauties. We can hardly believe that there was any

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close consideration of the fact that the work was an adaptation of the apparatus of the *sacra rappresentazione* to the secular play. The audience was without doubt absorbed in the immediate interest of the entertainment and was not engaged in critical analysis or esthetic speculations.

The costuming of the drama presented no difficulties. The skill already shown in the preparation of the sacred representations and the festal processions could here be utilized with excellent results. From 1470 to 1520, as we have already seen, was the period of the high development of the sacred play. Only a few years earlier the civic procession, or pageant, had shown in brilliant tableaux vivants the stories of the Minotaur and Iphigenie. The study of classic art and literature had blossomed in the very streets of Italy in a new avatar of the dramatic dance. From every account we glean testimony that the



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costuming of these spectacles was admirable. It must follow that so simple a task as the dressing of the characters in Poliziano's "Orfeo" was easily accomplished at that time when the Arcadian spirit of the story was precious to every cultured mind.

There were no mechanical problems of stage craft to be solved. The men who designed the cloud effects and the carriages for the floating angels in the open air spectacles might have disposed of them with ready invention, had they existed, but the theater of action, with its two pictures standing side by side, was simplicity itself. But let us not fall into the error of supposing that the scenery was crude or ill painted. The painter of the scenery of the production of Ariosto's "Suppositi," described by Pauluzo, was no less a personage than the mighty Raphael. The accounts of the writers of the latter part of the fifteenth and all of the sixteenth centuries

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are prolific in testimony as to the splendor of  
the pictorial elements in the festal entertain-  
ments of courts and pontiffs.<sup>1</sup>

Celler,<sup>2</sup> in speaking of the theater of the  
period of Louis XIV, says: "The simplicity  
of our fathers is somewhat doubtful; if they  
did not have as regards the theater ideas  
exactly like ours, the luxury which they  
displayed was most remarkable, and the ana-  
chronisms in local color were not so extraor-  
dinary as we have often been told." The au-  
thor a little further on calls attention to the  
fact that the *mise en scène* of the old mystery  
plays had combined splendor with naïve pov-  
erty. But he is careful to note that the lat-  
ter condition accompanied the representations

<sup>1</sup> "At the end of the fifteenth century, about 1480, are  
cited as famous scene painters Balthasar Reuzzi at Vol-  
terra, Parigi at Florence, Bibiena at Rome."—"Les  
Origines de l'Opera et le Ballet de la Reine," par Ludo-  
vic Celler. Paris, 1868.

<sup>2</sup> "Les Décors, les Costumes et la Mise en Scène au  
XVII<sup>e</sup> Siècle," par Ludovic Celler. Paris, 1869.

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given by strolling troupes in small villages or towns, while the former state was found where well paid and highly trained actors gave performances in rich municipalities. In the villages rude stage and scenery sufficed; in the cities all the resources of theatric art were employed.

Without doubt one of the most serious of all problems was that of lighting. One cannot believe that at so early a date as that of this first secular drama of Italy, the system of lighting the stage was such as to give satisfactory results. Yet it is probable that artificial lighting was provided, because it would have been extremely difficult to admit daylight in such a way as to illumine the stage without destroying much of the desirable illusion. Celler, in the first of his two volumes already quoted, tells how the "Ballet de la Reine" (1581) was lighted by torches and "lamps in the shape of little boats" so that

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the illumination, according to a contemporary record, was such as to shame the finest of days. But hyperbole was common then, and from Celler's second book we learn that even in the extravagant times of Louis XIV the lighting problem was an obstacle. It caused theatrical enterprises to keep chiefly to pieces which could be performed in the open air or at any rate by daylight. "The oldest representation," he says, "given in a closed hall, with artificial light and with scenery, appears to have been that of the 'Calandra,' a comedy which Balthazar Peruzzi caused to be performed before Leo X in 1516 at the Château of St. Ange." Duruy de Noirville<sup>1</sup> says that Peruzzi revived the "ancient decorations" of the theater in this "Calandra" which "was one of the first Italian plays in

<sup>1</sup> "Histoire du Théâtre de l'Opéra en France depuis l'Etablissement de l'Académie Royale de Musique jusqu'à présent." (Published anonymously.) Paris, 1753.

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music prepared for the theater. Italy never saw scenery more magnificent than that of Peruzzi." This is a matter in which Noirville cannot be called authoritative, but it is certain that the fame of the production of "Calandra" was well established. Noirville's authority for his statements was Bullart's "Académie des Sciences et d'Arts," Brussels, 1682. Whether the comedy had music or not we cannot now determine, and it is a matter of no grave importance. The interesting point is that the fame of the scenic attire of "Calandra" seems to have been well established among the early writers on the theater and that they also regarded as significant its indoor performance. The performance of Poliziano's "Orfeo," however, took place some forty years earlier than that of "Calandra," and it was without doubt in a closed hall and therefore most probably with artificial light of flambeaux and lamps.

## CHAPTER VII

### CHARACTER OF THE MUSIC

**I**T becomes now the duty of the author to make some examination of the music of this first lyric drama. But here we unfortunately find ourselves adrift upon a windless ocean. We are driven to the necessity of deducing our information from the results of analogical reconstruction. Nothing indeed can be more fascinating than the attempt to arrive at a comprehension of the music of Poliziano's "Orfeo." All record of it appears to be lost and the Italian savants who have given us illuminating studies of the literary structure of the work, of its environment and its performance, have hazarded scarcely

a remote conjecture as to the style of its music.

But we are not without a considerable amount of knowledge of the kinds of music in use at the time when this work was produced and we can therefore arrive at some idea of the nature of the lyric elements of the "Orfeo." First of all we may fairly conclude that some portions of the text were spoken. It seems, for instance, improbable that the prologue delivered by Mercury could have been set to music. If all other considerations are set aside there still remains the important fact that the hero of the play is a musical personage. He is to move the powers of hell by his impassioned song. It would, therefore, be artistically foolish to begin this new species of work with a piece of vocal solo which might rob the invocation of Orpheus of its desired effect. It is altogether probable that the prologue was spoken, and that the

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opening dialogue in the scene between the two shepherds was also spoken. After the lines

“Forth from thy wallet take thy pipe and we  
Will sing awhile beneath the leafy trees;  
For well my nymph is pleased with melody.”

there follows a number which the author plainly indicates as lyric, for he calls it a canzona. Beginning with this it seems to me that we may content ourselves with inquiring into the musical character of those parts which were without doubt lyrically treated in the performance. In the early version of the poem we have a stage direction which shows that the Latin text beginning “O meos longum modulata” was sung by Orpheus. Again it is made plain by the text, as well as by the details of the ancient legend itself, that the hero sang to the accompaniment of his lyre when he was arousing the sympathies of the infernal powers. It is not certain that song



was employed in the scene between him and Tisiphone. All the choruses, however, were unquestionably sung.

The propositions which must now be laid down are these: First, the choral parts of the work were in the form of the Italian frottola, and the final one may have approached more closely to the particular style of the canto carnascialesco (carnival song) and was certainly a ballata, or dance song. Second, the solo parts were constructed according to the method developed by the lutenists, who devised a manner of singing one part of a polyphonic composition and utilizing the other parts as the instrumental support. Third, there were two obligato instruments, the pipe used in the duet of the two shepherds, and the "lira" played by Orpheus. Fourth, there was probably an instrumental accompaniment, at least to the choral parts.

In regard to the choruses, then, we must

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bear in mind the well established characteristics of the madrigal dramas of the sixteenth century. In these works the choruses were set to music in the madrigal style and they were frequently of great beauty. But the Italian madrigal had not been well developed at the time of the production of Poliziano's "Orfeo," while the frottola was the most popular song of the people.

The frottola was a secular song, written in polyphonic style. The polyphony was simple and the aim of the composition was popularity. It is essential for us to bear in mind the fact that in the fifteenth century the cultivation of part singing was ardent and widespread. The ability to sing music written in harmonized form was not confined to the educated classes. It extended through all walks of life, and while the most elaborate compositions of the famous masters were beyond the powers of the people,

the lighter and more facile pieces were readily sung.<sup>1</sup>

The teachings and practice of the Netherlands masters spread through Europe rapidly, and some of the masters themselves went into Italy, where they became the apostles of a new artistic religion. The Netherlands musicians began early to write secular songs in a style which eventually developed into the madrigal. Frequently they took folk tunes and treated them polyphonically. Sometimes they used themes of their own invention. In time musicians of small skill, undertaking to imitate these earliest secular songs,

<sup>1</sup> "During the fifteenth century the love of part-singing seems to have taken hold of all phases of society in the Netherlands; princes and people, corporate bodies, both lay and clerical, vying with each other in the formation of choral societies." Naumann, "History of Music," Vol. I, p. 318.

"The practice of concerted singing was not confined to the social circles of the dilettanti, but was also very popular in the army; and we have before alluded to the fact that Antoine Busnois and numerous others followed Charles the Bold into the field." Ibid., p. 320.

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developed the popular form called frottola. Later we find some of the famous masters cultivating this music of the people. Adrian Willaert, who settled in Venice in 1516, wrote frottole and gondola songs in frottola form. It was from such works that he advanced to the composition of the madrigal of which he was so famous a composer and which he raised to the dignity of an art work.

The residence of Josquin des Prés in Italy doubtless had an immense influence on the development of the Italian madrigal, but at a period later than that of Poliziano's "Orfeo" and of the best of the frottole. Josquin was a singer in the Sistine Chapel in 1484 and his first successes as a composer were obtained in Rome. Later he went to Ferrara where he wrote for the Duke Ercole d'Este his famous mass, "Hercules Dux Ferrariæ." But these activities of Josquin had little relation to the frottola.

The point to be made here is that, at the time when Poliziano's "Orfeo" was produced at Mantua, the Italian madrigal was in its infancy, while its plebian parent, the frottole was in the lusty vigor of its maturity. At the same time the popularity of part song was established in Italy and music of this type was employed even for the most convivial occasions. This is proved by the position which the variety of frottola, called "carnival song," occupied in the joyous festivities of the Italians. Note the narrative (not wholly inexact) of Burney:

"Historians relate that Lorenzo il Magnifico in carnival time used to go out in the evening, followed by a numerous company of persons on horseback, masked and richly dressed, amounting sometimes to upwards of three hundred, and the same number on foot with wax tapers burning in their hands. In this manner they marched through the city till three or four o'clock in the morning, sing-

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ing songs, ballads, madrigals, catches or songs of humor upon subjects then in vogue, with musical harmony, in four, eight, twelve, and even fifteen parts, accompanied with various instruments; and these, from being performed in carnival time, were called *Canti Carnascialesci*.”<sup>1</sup>

Burney errs in supposing that these songs were written in so many parts. Three and four parts were the rule; five parts were extremely rare. The actual words of *Il Lasca*, who wrote the introduction to the collection of *Triumphs and Carnival Songs* published in Florence, 1559, are: “Thus they traversed the city, singing to the accompaniment of music arranged for four, eight, twelve or even fifteen voices, supported by various instruments.” This would not necessarily mean what musicians call “fifteen real parts.” The subject has been exhaustively and learnedly

<sup>1</sup> “The Present State of Music in France and Italy,” by Charles Burney. London, 1773.

studied by Ambros,<sup>1</sup> who has examined the frottola in all its varieties. He has given several examples and among them he calls attention to a particularly beautiful number (without text) for five voices. This, he is certain, is one of the carnival songs which Heinrich Isaak was wont to write at the pleasure of Lorenzo.

The source of our knowledge of the frottola music is nine volumes of these songs, averaging sixty-four to the volume, published by Petrucci at Venice between 1504 and 1509, and a book of twenty-two published at Rome by Junta in 1526. Ambros's study of these works convinced him that the composers "while not having actually sat in the school of the Netherlanders, had occasionally listened at the door." The composers of the frottole showed sound knowledge of the ancient rules

<sup>1</sup> "Geschichte der Musik" von August Wilhelm Ambros. Leipsic, 1880.

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of ligature and the correct use of accidentals; on the other hand it is always held by the writers of the early periods that an elaborately made frottola is no longer a frottola, but a madrigal. Thus Cerone<sup>1</sup> in the twelfth book of his "Melopeo" gives an account of the manner of composing frottole. He demands for this species of song a simple and easily comprehended harmony, such as appears only in common melodies. So we see that a frottola is practically a folk song artistically treated.

"He who puts into a frottola fugues, imitations, etc., is like one who sets a worthless stone in gold. A frottola thus ennobled would become a madrigal, while a madrigal, all too scantily treated, would sink to a frottola." A typical frottola by Scotus shows observance of Cerone's requirements.

<sup>1</sup> "El Melopeo y Maestro," by Dominic Pierre Cerone. Naples, 1613. (Quoted here from Ambros.)



# Character of the Music

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Discant

Fal - la . . . ce spe - ran - za

Altus

Fal - - la ce spe - ran - za

Tenor

Fal - - la ce spe - ran - za

Bass

O fal - la ce spe - ran - za

che sai dol - - - ce ogni sten - to

che sai dol - ce ogni sten - to

che sai dol - ce ogni sten - to

che sai dol - ce ogni sten - to

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e a - mo - ro - - so tor - men - to

e a - mo - ro - - so tor - men - to

e a - mo - ro - - so tor - men - to

e a - mo - ro - - so tor - men - to

co - mo speo - so in - gan - na

co - mo speo-so . . ingan - na . .

co - mo speo - so in - gan -

co - mo speo - so in - gan - -

(2)

chia - te cre - - - de.

. . . chia - te cre - - - de.

na chia - te cre - - - de.

na chia - te - cre - - - de.

These compositions are what we would call part songs and they are usually constructed in simple four-part harmony, without fugato passages or imitations. When imitations do appear, they are secondary and do not deal with the fundamental melodic ideas of the song. Nothing corresponding to subject and answer is found in these works. If we turn from a frottola to a motet by the same composer, we meet at once the device of canonic imitation and with it a clearly different artis-

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tic purpose. These composers evidently did not expect the people to be such accomplished musicians as the singers of the trained choirs.

“Indeed, the frottola descended by an extremely easy transition to the villanelle, a still more popular form of composition and one marked by even less relationship to the counterpoint of the low countries. At the time of the full development of the madrigal the serious and humorous elements which dwelt together in the frottola separated completely. The purely sentimental and idealistic frottola became the madrigal; the clearly humorous frottola became the villanelle. When these two clearly differentiated species were firmly established, the frottola disappeared.

“The madrigal existed as early as the fourteenth century, but its general spread dates from the time of Adrian Willaert (1480–1562). The madrigal was originally a pastoral song, but the form came to be utilized for the expression of varied sentiments and it was treated with a musicianship which ad-

vanced it toward the more stately condition of the 'durchcomponirt' motet. In the villanelle the influence of the strophic folk song is clearly perceptible. The frottola to a certain extent stood in the middle. It is sung verse by verse, but its musical scheme is almost always conceived in a much broader spirit than that of the villanelle and gives to it almost the appearance of a durchcomponirt work. But the systematic repetition of certain couplets in the manner of a refrain occasions the recurrence of whole musical periods. Thus does the frottola acquire from its text that architectural shape which places it in marked contrast to the swift-paced and fluid contrapuntal chanson of the Netherlanders. Its rhythm and accents are arranged not by the needs of contrapuntal development, but by the meter of the line and the accent of the Italian tongue. This appears most prominently in the upper voice part, where often the controlling melody seems ready to break quite through in pure song style, but only partly succeeds. In the texture of the voices all kinds of imitations ap-

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pear, but only subordinated and in very modest setting.

“All this was a part of the steady progress toward monody, the final goal of Italian musical art, where, in extreme contrast to the Netherlandish subordination to school, the emergence and domination of individuality, the special and significant distinction of the Renaissance, were taking shape. Hence Castiglione in his ‘Cortegiano’ gives preference to the one-voiced song (‘recitar alla lira’) and it was quite natural that we find in the Petrucci collection frottole originally composed for four voices now appearing as soprano solos with lute accompaniment, the latter being arranged from the other three voices.”<sup>1</sup>

Castiglione (1478–1529) wrote somewhat later than the period of Poliziano. The “Cortegiano” dates from 1514, though it was not published till a few years later, and the frottola was at the zenith of its excellence in

<sup>1</sup> This passage is not a literal quotation, but partly a paraphrase and partly a condensation of the text of Ambros.

the time of Bernado Tromboncino, who belongs to the latter half of the fifteenth century. But the frottola was well established before the date of Poliziano's "Orfeo," for minor Italian composers had poured forth a mass of small lyrics for which they found their models in the polyphonic secular songs of Antoine de Busnois (1440-1482) and others of the Netherlands school, especially such writers as Loyset Compère, of St. Quentin, who died in 1518. Two of his frottole appear in the Petrucci collection, showing that he was acquainted with this Italian form, and that his productions in it were known and admired in Italy. His frottole are distinguished by uncommon grace and gaiety, for the frottola was generally rather passionate and melancholy, and full of what Castiglione called "flebile dolcezza."

In view, then, of the state of part song composition in Italy at the time when Poli-

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ziano's "Orfeo" was written we are safe in assuming that its two choral numbers were set to music of the frottola type. The use of the refrains, "l'aria di pianti" in the first, and "Ciascun segua, O Bacco, te," in the second, is an additional influence in moving us toward this conclusion because we know that it was the employment of the refrain which helped to lead the frottola toward the strophic form of the song. We are, moreover, justified in concluding from the character of the final chorus that it was a ballata or dance song and hence a frottola of the carnival song variety. No student of classic literature will need any demonstration of the probability that the Maenads in their Bacchic invocation danced; and here we have in all likelihood the origin of that fashion of concluding operas with a chorus and a dance which survived as late as Mozart's "Die Zauberflöte."



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE SOLOS OF THE "ORFEO"

THE failure of the vocal solo in the field of artistic music of Europe might be traced to the establishment of the unisonal chant in the service of the Roman Catholic Church. Yet in defining such ground we should easily be led to exaggerate the importance of the solo. In the infancy of modern music the solo existed only in the folk song, in the rhapsodies of religious ecstasies and in the uncertain lyrics of the minnesingers and troubadours. Of these the folk song, and the troubadour lyrics had some musical figure, out of which a clear form might have been developed. But, as all students of musical history know, the study of the art originated among the fathers of the church and in their

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pursuit of principles of structure they chose a path which led them directly away from the rhythmic and strophic basis of the song and into the realm of polyphonic imitation. The vocal solo had no place in their system and hence it never appears in the art music of their time.

Consequently the advent of the dramatic recitative introduced by Peri, Caccini and Cavaliere appears to be a striking phenomenon in the growth of music, and we are easily induced to believe that this new species burst upon the artistic firmament like a meteor. The truth is, however, that the vague desire for solo expression had made itself felt in music for centuries before the Florentine movement. The real significance of the Florentine invention was its destruction of the musical shackles which had so long hampered the advance toward truthful utterance.

We read frequently that the first instance

of solo singing was the delivery of a madrigal of Corteccia in a play of 1539. The character Sileno sang the upper part and accompanied himself on the violone, while the lower parts were given to other instruments. But this was nothing new. This kind of solo was considerably older than Sileno and the performance of Baccio Ugolino in Poliziano's "Orfeo" was unquestionably of the same type. And this manner of delivering a solo, which Castiglione called "recitar alla lira," was a descendant of the art of singing with lute accompaniment which was well known in the fourteenth century.

Doubtless Casella, who was born in 1300 and set to music Dante's sonnet "Amor che nella mente," was one of the *cantori a liuto*. Minuccio d'Arezzo, mentioned by Boccaccio, was another. Here again we must recur to the observations of Burney and the examinations of Ambros. The former records that in the Vatican there is a poem by Lemmo of

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Pistoja, with the note "Casella diede il suono." It is likely that this musician was well known in Italy and that he would not have had to rely for his immortality upon the passing mention of a poet if the art of notation had been more advanced in his day.

The story of Minuccio, as told by Boccaccio, is this. A young maiden of Palermo, seized with violent love for the King, begged Minuccio to help her. Not being a verse-maker himself, he hastened to the poet Mico of Siena, who wrote a poem setting forth the maiden's woes. This Minuccio set at once to exquisite and heart-moving music and sang it for the King to the accompaniment of his own viol. The poem is in the main strophic and the melody is of similar nature. Whether Boccaccio or Mico wrote the poem matters not in the historical sense. The important facts are that such a poem exists and that a hint as to its music has come down to us.

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In the "Decameron" we are told often how some one or other of the personages sings to the company. Sometimes it is a dance song, as for example the "Io son si vaga della mia bellezza." To this all the others spontaneously dance while singing the refrain in chorus. Another time the queen of the day, Emilia, invites Dioneo to sing a canzona. There is much pretty banter, while Dineo teases the women by making false starts at several then familiar songs. In another place Dioneo with lute and Fiametta with viol play a dance. Again one sings while Dioneo accompanies her on the lute.

Thus Boccaccio in his marvelous portraiture of the social life of his time has casually handed down to us invaluable facts about vocal and instrumental music. There is no question that Ambros is fully justified in his conclusion that the *cantori a liuto* were a well-marked class of musicians. They were vocal

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soloists and often improvisatori, clearly differentiated from the cantori a libro, who were "singers by book and note" and who sang the polyphonic art music of the time.

It is pretty well established that the songs of Dante were everywhere known and sung. We have reason to believe that many of those of Boccaccio were also familiar to the people. We may also feel confident that when most of the Italian lute singers of the time had acquired sufficient skill to make their own poems as well as their own melodies, they followed the models provided in the verses of the great masters. What is still more important for us to note is that these lyrics were strophical and that they were no further removed from the folk song of the era than the frottola was. Indeed they bore a closer resemblance to the frottola. They differed in that they were solos with instrumental accompaniment instead of being part songs unaccompanied.

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But this difference is not so important as it appears. The part song method was at the basis of all these old lute songs. This is well proved by the fact that before the end of the century the device of turning part songs into solo pieces with lute accompaniment had become quite familiar. It was so common that we are driven to something more substantial than a mere suspicion that Casella and Minuccio employed a similar method and that the domination of polyphonic thought in music had spread from the regions occupied by the church compositions of Dufay and his contemporaries downward into the secular fancies of people whose daily thought was influenced by the authority of the church.

Furthermore this method of turning part songs into solos survived until the era of the full fledged madrigal dramas of Vecchi in the latter part of the sixteenth century, and at what may be called the golden era of the frot-

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tola was generally and successfully applied to that species of composition. Whatever the troubadours and minnesingers may have done toward establishing a metrical melodic form of monophonic character was soon obliterated by the swift popularity of part singing and the immense vogue of the secular songs of the polyphonic composers. When the desire for the vocal solo made itself felt in the exquisitely sensuous life of medieval Italy, it found its only gratification in the easy art of adaptation. In such scenes as those described by Boccaccio and much later by Castiglione there was no incentive to artistic reform, no impulse to creative activity.

We find ourselves, then, equipped with these significant facts: first, that the composition of secular music in polyphonic forms was at least as old as the thirteenth century; that part singing was practised in Italy as far back as the fourteenth century; that songs for



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one voice were made with Italian texts at least as early as the time of Dante and Boccaccio; that the art of arranging polyphonic compositions as vocal solos by giving the secondary parts to the accompanying instrument was known in the time of Minuccio and Casella; that at the time of Poliziano's "Orfeo" the frottola was the reigning form of part song, and that then and for years afterward it was customary to arrange frottole as solos by giving the polyphony to the lute or other accompanying instrument.

It seems, then, that we shall not be far astray if we conclude that the solo parts of Poliziano's lyric drama consisted of music of the better frottola type and that the moving appeals of his hero were accompanied on a "lyre" of the period in precisely the same manner as frottole transformed into vocal solos were accompanied on the lute. For these reasons an example of the method of ar-

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ranging a frottola for voice and lute will give us some idea of the character of the music sung by Baccio Ugolino in the "Orfeo." The examples here offered are those given in the great history of Ambros. The first is a fragment of a frottola (composed by Tromboncino) in its original shape. The second shows the same music as arranged for solo voice and lute by Franciscus Bossinensis as found in a collection published by Petrucci in 1509.

The image displays four staves of musical notation, each with a different clef and key signature, illustrating the adaptation of a frottola melody. The lyrics are written below the notes.

- Staff 1 (Treble clef, C major):** Original instrumental form. The melody begins with a whole rest, followed by a half note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note C5, a quarter note B4, and a quarter note A4. The lyrics are "Af - flit - ti spir - ti".
- Staff 2 (Treble clef, C major):** Arranged for solo voice and lute. The melody is simplified, using only whole and half notes. The lyrics are "Af - flit - ti spir - ti".
- Staff 3 (Treble clef, C major):** Further arrangement. The melody is more complex, using eighth and sixteenth notes. The lyrics are "Af - flit - ti . . . af - flit - ti".
- Staff 4 (Cello clef, C major):** Arranged for solo voice and lute. The melody is simplified, using only whole and half notes. The lyrics are "Af - flit - ti spirti".

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miei . . . sie - te con - ten - ti

mi - ei sie - te con - ten - ti

spir - ti . . . miei sie - te . . . con - ten - ti

miei sie - te con - ten - ti

Af - flit - ti

spir - ti miei . . . sia - te con - ten - ti

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How far removed this species of lyric solo was from the dramatic recitative of Peri and Caccini is apparent at a single glance. But on the other hand it is impossible to be blind to its relationship to the more metrical arioso of Monteverde's earlier work or perhaps to the canzone of Caccini's "*Nuove Musiche*." The line of development or progress is distinctly traceable. At this point it is not essential that we should satisfy ourselves that the solo songs of Caccini were descendants of the lyrics of the *cantori a liuto*, for when the two species are placed in juxtaposition the lineage is almost unmistakable. What we do need to remember here is that the method of the lute singers entered fully into the construction of the score—if it may be so called—of Poliziano's "*Orfeo*" and passed from that to the madrigal drama and was there brought under the reformatory experiments of Galilei and his contemporaries. This sub-

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ject must be discussed more fully in a later chapter.

The first lyric number of the "Orfeo," that sung by Aristæus, is plainly labeled "canzona," and was, therefore, without doubt a song made after the manner of the lutenists. The words "forth from thy wallet take thy pipe" indicate that a wind instrument figured in this number. What sort of instrument we shall inquire in the next chapter. At present we may content ourselves with assuming that no highly developed solo part was assigned to it. The existence of such a part would imply the co-existence of considerable musicianship on the part of the pipe player and of an advanced technic in the composition of instrumental obbligati. It might also presuppose the existence of a system of notation much better than that of the fifteenth century. But this is a point about which we cannot be too sure.

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The decision must be sought in the general state of music at the time. The learned masters cultivated only *a capella* choral music, and the unlearned imitated them. There was no systematic study of instrumental composition. Even the organ had as yet acquired no independent office, but simply supported voices by doubling their notes. It seems unlikely, then, that the pipe in "Orfeo" could have had a real part. What it probably did was to repeat as a sort of ritornello the clearly marked refrain of the song. This would have been thoroughly in keeping with the growing tendency of the frottola to use refrains and advance toward strophical form.

The lyre, with which Baccio Ugolino as Orfeo accompanied himself, may have been a cithara, but the probabilities are that it was not. As late as the time of Prætorius's great work (*Syntagma Musicum*) the word "lyra" was used to designate certain instruments of

close relationship to the viol family. Prætorius tells us that there were two kinds of Italian lyres. The large lyre, called *lironi perfetto*, or arce violyra, was in structure like the bass of the viola da gamba, but that the body and the neck on account of the numerous strings were somewhat wider. Some had twelve, some fourteen and some even sixteen strings, so that madrigals and compositions both chromatic and diatonic could be performed and a fine harmony produced. The small lyre was like the tenor viola di braccio and was called the lyra di braccio. It had seven strings, two of them outside the finger board and the other five over it. Upon this instrument also certain harmonized compositions could be played. The pictures of these two lyres show that they looked much like viols and were played with bows.<sup>1</sup> An eighth

<sup>1</sup> Michael Prætorius, "Syntagma Musicum," vol. ii, Organographia. Wolfenbüttel, 1619-20.

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century manuscript shows an instrument with a body like a mandolin, a neck without frets and a small bow. This instrument is entitled "lyra" in the manuscript. If now we come down to the period when the modern opera was taking form we learn that Galilei sang his own "Ugolino" monody and accompanied himself on the viola. Various pictures show us that small instruments of the bowed varieties were used by the minnesingers, and again by jongleurs in the fifteenth century. Early Italian painters put such instruments into the hands of angels and carvers left them for us to see, as in the cathedral of Amiens. In fact there is every reason to believe that the wandering poets and minstrels of the Middle Ages used the small vielle, rebek or lyre for their accompaniments much oftener than the harp, which was more cumbersome and a greater impediment in traveling.

The instruments used to support song, that



of the troubadour or that of a Casella, or later still that of a Galilei, being of the same lineage, the only novelty was the adaptation to them of the lutenist's method of arranging polyphonic music for one voice with accompaniment. That this offered no large difficulties is proved by the account of Prætorius. If at the close of the sixteenth century chromatic compositions, which were then making much progress, could be performed on a bowed lyre, there is no reason to think that in Poliziano's time there would have been much labor in arranging frottola melodies for voice and lyra di braccio. It is safe to assume that the instrument to which Baccio Ugolino was wont to improvise and which was therefore utilized in "Orfeo" was the lyra di braccio and that del Lungo's imaginative picture must be corrected by the substitution of the bow for the plectrum. We have not even recourse to the supposition that

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Ugolino may have employed the pizzicato since that was not invented till after his day by Monteverde.

We are, however, compelled to conclude that Baccio Ugolino preceded Corteccia in this manner of solo, afterwards called "recitar alla lira." We may now reconstruct for ourselves the classic scene with Orpheus "singing on the hill to his lyre" the verses "O meos longum modulata lusus." The music was the half melancholy, half passionate melody of some wandering Italian frottola which readily fitted itself to the sonorous Sapphics. The accompaniment on the mellow lyra di braccio, one of the tender sisters of the viola, was a simplified version of the subordinate voice parts of the frottola. And perchance there were even other instruments, an embryonic orchestra. Here, indeed, we must pause lest reconstructive ardor carry us too far. We must content ourselves with the conclusion that the vocal

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music of the entire drama was simple in melodic structure, for such was the character of the part music out of which it was made. It was certainly well fitted to be one of the parents of the recitative of Peri and Caccini with the church chant as the other.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE ORCHESTRA OF THE "ORFEO"

THAT there was some sort of an orchestra in the "Orfeo" is probable, though it is not wholly certain. The letter of the Envoy Pauluzo on the performance of Ariosto's "Suppositi" at the Vatican in March, 1518, has already been quoted. From this we learn that there was an orchestra containing fifes, bag-pipes, two cornets, some viols and lutes and a small organ. It is a pity that Pauluzo did not record the number of stringed instruments in order that we might have some idea of the balance of this orchestra. On the other hand, as there was no system of orchestration at that time, we might not learn much from the enumeration. Rolland, in comment-

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ing on this letter, says, as we have already noted, that this was the type of musical plays performed in Italy at least as far back as the time of Poliziano. There is no imperative demand that Rolland's statement on this point should be accepted as authoritative, for his admirable book is without evidence that the author gave this matter any special attention. On the other hand it is almost certain that his assertion contains the truth. All the instruments mentioned by him were in use long before the date of the "Orfeo." Furthermore assemblies of instruments played together, as we well know. But we are without data as to what they played, and are driven to the conclusion that since there was no separate composition for instruments till near the close of the sixteenth century, the performance of the early assemblies of instruments must have been devoted to popular songs or dances of the time. A little exami-

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nation into the character of these early "orchestras" may serve to throw light on the nature of the instrumental accompaniments in Poliziano's "Orfeo."

Symonds's description of the performance of Cecchi's "Esaltazione della Croce," already quoted in Chapter III, shows us that in 1589 a sacred representation had an orchestra of viols, lutes, horns and organ, that it played an interlude with special music composed by Luca Bati, and that it also accompanied a solo allotted to the Deity. Another interlude showed David dancing to lute, viol, trombone and harp. It is evident, therefore, that at a period a century after that of the "Orfeo" there was a certain sort of orchestra. But this period was somewhat later than that of Striggio, who had already employed orchestras of considerable variety. In his "La Cofanaria" (1566) he used two gravicembali, four viols, two trombones, two straight

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flutes, one cornet, one traverso and two lutes, and in a motet composed in 1569 he had eight viols, eight trombones, eight flutes, an instrument of the spinet family and a large lute, together with voices. To delve backward from this point is not so easy as it looks, yet however far back we may choose to go we cannot fail to find evidences that assemblies of instruments were employed, sometimes to accompany voices and again to play independently.

The antiquity of music at banquets, for example, is attested by sayings as old as Solomon, by bitter comments of Plato, by the account of Xenophon and by passages in the comedies of Aristophanes. The instrumental music at banquets in Plato's time was that of Greek girl flute players and harpers. Early in the Middle Ages the banquet music consisted of any collection of instruments that chanced to be at hand. In an ancient manuscript in the National Library of Paris there is a pic-

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ture of Heinrich of Meissen, the minnesinger (born 1260), conducting a choir of singers and instrumental performers. The instruments are viols and wooden wind instruments of the schalmei family. A bas relief in the church of St. Gregory at Boscherville in Normandy shows an orchestra of several players. This relief is of the twelfth century. It presents first on the left a king who plays a three-stringed gamba, which he holds between his knees, like a violoncello. A woman performer handles an organistrum, a sort of large hurdy-gurdy, sometimes (as apparently in this case) requiring two players, one for the crank and another for the stops. Then comes a man with a pandean pipe, next another with a semicircular harp and then one with a portable organ. Next comes a performer on a round-bodied fiddle (the usual form of the instrument at that time). Next to him is a harper, using a plectrum, and at the



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right end of the group is a pair of players, man and woman, performing on a glockenspiel. This orchestra was probably playing for dancing, as no singers are in sight.

In a fifteenth century breviary reposing in the library of Brussels there is a representation of a similar orchestra, and this brings us nearer to the era of Poliziano's "Orfeo." The instruments are harp, lute, dulcimer, hurdy-gurdy, double flute, pommer (an ancient oboe form), bag-pipe, trombone, portable organ, triangle and a straight flute with its accompanying little tambour. One of the musicians did not play, but beat time as a director. It is interesting to make a brief comparison between the two representations, for this shows the novelties which entered between the twelfth and the fifteenth centuries. The lute, the trombone, the pommer and the triangle were new acquisitions. If now we refer again to the orchestra of 1518

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mentioned by Pauluzo we shall seem to have gone backward. But the truth must be clear to all students that these orchestras were not brought together with any definite musical design. They consisted of the players who chanced to be at hand. Even the letter of the Duke of Milan in 1473 (see Chapter III), in which he announces his intention of engaging a good orchestra from Rome, can hardly mean anything more than a purpose to get as many good instrumentalists as he could.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Although the existence of 'Orfeo' as an opera appears to me to be problematical, there would be nothing impossible about the construction of a tragedy accompanied by music, because instruments were cultivated in Italy more than in France. Before that epoch the Medici had given concerts at Florence. Giovanni de Medici died in 1429, and Cosimo, who succeeded him and reigned till 1464, gave at the Pitti Palace concerts where there were as many as four hundred musicians. Under his successors and before the death of Alexander de' Medici in 1537, the violinists Pietro Caldara and Antonio Mazzini were often the objects of veritable ovations, and about the same time, 1536, at Venice, was played a piece called 'Il Sacrificio,' in which violins sustained the principal parts."—"Les Origines de l'Opera et le Ballet de la Reine," par Ludovic Celler. Paris, 1868.

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While, then, it must be confessed that no conclusive evidence can be produced that an orchestra was employed in the "Orfeo," the indications are strong that there was one. We may assume without much fear of error that it was used only to accompany the choral numbers and the dance and that in fulfilling the last mentioned function it was heard to the best advantage. Years after the period of the "Orfeo" of Poliziano independent instrumental forms had not yet been developed. Fully a century later compositions "*da cantare e sonare*" betray to us the fact that bodies of instruments performing without voices merely played the madrigals which at other times were sung. Such compositions were not conceived in the instrumental idiom and must have floated in an exceedingly thin atmosphere when separated from text and the expressive nuances of the human tone. But the music of the dance was centuries old and it had in all

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eras been sung by instruments, as well as by voices. The invasion of the realm of popular melody by crude imitations of the polyphonic devices of the Netherlanders could not have crushed out the melodic and rhythmic basis of dance music and this had fitted itself to the utterance of instruments. We are therefore justified in believing that if the accompaniment of the first chorus in the "Orfeo" was superfluous and vague that of the final ballata must have been clearer in character and better suited to the nature of the scene. The dance following the ballata must have been effective. The instruments were most probably lutes, viols, flute, oboe, and possibly bag-pipe, hurdy-gurdy and little organ.

We have already inquired into the nature of the instrument which Baccio Ugolino carried on the stage and with which after the manner of the minstrels of his time he accompanied himself. It remains now only to ask what

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was the pipe which the shepherd Aristæus mentions in the first scene. It was probably not a flageolet, though that instrument suggests itself as particularly appropriate to the episode. But the good Dr. Burney says that the flageolet was invented by the Sieur Juvigny, who played it in the "Ballet Comique de la Royne," the first French pastoral opera, in 1581. It could have been a recorder, the ancestor of the flageolet, which was probably in use in the fourteenth and surely in the fifteenth century. But more probably it was one of the older reed instruments of the oboe family, the pommer or possibly a schalmei. The schalmei is mentioned as far back as Sebastian Virdung's "*Musica getuscht und ausgezogen*" (1511). Its ancestor was probably the zamr-el-kebyr, an Oriental reed instrument. The schalmei was developed into a whole family, enumerated by Prætorius in the work already mentioned. The highest of these, the

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little schalmei, was seldom used, but the "soprano schalmei is the primitive type of the modern oboe."<sup>1</sup>

It is thus tolerably certain that the instrumental tone used to voice the pastoral character of the scene was the same as that which Beethoven used in his "Pastoral" symphony, as Berlioz used in his "Fantastic," as Gounod used in his "Faust," and that thus at least one element of the instrumental embodiment of Poliziano's story has come down to us.

<sup>1</sup> See "A Note on Oboes," by Philip Hale. Programme Books of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, season of 1905-06, p. 644.

## CHAPTER X

### FROM FROTTOLA DRAMA TO MADRIGAL

WITH such a simple and dignified beginning as that of the "Orfeo" how came the lyric drama of the next century to wander into such sensuous luxuriance, such spectacular extravagance of both action and music? In the drama of Poliziano the means employed, as well as the ends sought, were artistic and full of suggestions as to possible methods of development. But whereas the opera in the seventeenth century suffered from contact with the public, the lyric drama of the sixteenth was led into paths of dalliance by the dominant taste of splendor-loving courts. The character of this taste encouraged the development of the musical appa-

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tus of the lyric drama toward opulent complexity, and the medium for this was found in the rapidly growing madrigal, which soon ruled the realm of secular music. In it the frottola, raised to an art form and equipped with the wealth of contrapuntal device, passed almost insensibly into a new life. Berlioz says that it takes a long time to discover musical Mediterraneans and still longer to learn to navigate them. The madrigal was a musical Mediterranean. It was the song of the people touched by the culture of the church. It was the priestly art of cathedral music transferred to the service of human emotion.

The Italian madrigal had a specifically Italian character. It followed the path of sensuous dalliance trod by the people of Boccaccio's tales. It differentiated itself from the secular song of the northern musicians as clearly as the architecture of Venice distinguished itself from all other Gothic art. Even in that era



those characteristics which subsequently defined the racial and temperamental differences between the musical art of northern Europe and that of Italy were fully perceptible. The north moved steadily toward instrumental polyphony, Italy toward the individual utterance of the solo voice. That her first experiments were made in the popular madrigal form was to be expected. The "Orfeo" of Poliziano and his unknown musical associates set the model for a century. In the course of that century the irresistible drift of Italian art feeling, retarded as it was by the supreme vogue of musicians trained in the northern schools, moved steadily toward its destination, the solo melody, yet the end was not reached till the madrigal had worked itself to its logical conclusion, to wit, a demonstration of its own inherent weakness. We must not be blind to the fact that while the Netherland art at first powerfully affected that of

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Italy, the latter in the end reacted on the former, and these two influences crossed and recrossed in ways that demand the closest scrutiny of the analytical historian. But at this particular period that which immediately concerns us is the manner in which Italian musical art defined itself. The secret of the differentiation already mentioned must be sought in the powerful feeling of Gothic art for organization. Gothic architecture is above all things organic and Teutonic music has the same character. Its most Gothic form, the North German fugue, which is the instrumental descendant of the Netherlands church music, is the most closely organized of musical types. The Italian architecture, on the other hand, displayed an aversion for the infinite detail of Gothic methods and found its individual expression in the grand and patent relations of noble mass effects. This same feeling speedily found its way into Italian

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music, even that composed by the Netherland masters who had settled in Italy.

Adrian Willaert, who is often called the father of the madrigal (despite the fact that madrigals were written before he was born), became chapel master of St. Mark's, Venice, in 1527. He seized with avidity the suggestion offered by the existence of two organs in the cathedral and wrote great works "for two choruses of four voices each, so that the choruses could answer each other across the church. He paid much less attention to rigid canonic style than his predecessors had done because it was not suited to the kind of music which he felt was fitting for his church. He sought for grand, broad mass effects, which he learned could be obtained only by the employment of frequent passages in chords. So he began trying to write his counterpoint in such a way that the voice parts should often come together in succes-

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sions of chords. In order to do this he was compelled to adopt the kind of formations still in use and the fundamental chord relations of modern music — the tonic, dominant and subdominant.”<sup>1</sup>

In music of this kind there was no longer a field for the intricate working of canonically constructed voice parts. It must seek its chief results in the opposition of one choir against the other, not in multiplicity of voice parts, but in imposing contrasts as of “deep answering unto deep.” The development of fundamental chord harmonies was inevitable and from them in the fullness of time was bound to spring the pure harmonic style. Chord successions without any melodic union cannot be long sustained, and the Italians, with the tentative achievements of the frotto-lists before them, were not long blind to this

<sup>1</sup> From the present author's “How Music Developed.” New York, 1898.

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fact. Leone Battista Alberti, father of Renaissance architecture, in writing of his church of St. Francis at Rimini uses the expression "tutta questa musica." One understands him to mean the harmonious disposition of the parts of his design so that all "sound" together, as it were, for the artistic perception.

It was feeling of this same kind that led the apostles of the Netherlands school and their Italian pupils to follow the physical trend of all Italian art rather than struggle to impose upon it the shackles of an uncongenial intellectuality forged in the canonic shops of Ockeghem and his disciples. The seed of beauty had been sown by the mighty Josquin des Prés what time he was a Roman singer and a Mantuan composer. The fruit blossomed in the Renaissance music of Willaert, Cyprian de Rore and others and came to its perfection in the later works of Palestrina

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and Lasso. The resistless operation of the tendencies of the school was such that at the close of the sixteenth century we are suddenly confronted with the knowledge that all the details of polyphony so studiously cultivated by the northern schools have in Italy suddenly been packed away in a thorough bass supporting one voice which is permitted to proclaim itself in a proud individuality.

Yet if we permit ourselves to believe that the lyric solo made but a single spasmodic appearance in the "Orfeo" and had to be born again in the artistic conversion brought about by the labors of Galilei and Caccini, we shall be deceived. The fashion set by Poliziano's production was not wholly abandoned and throughout the remainder of the fifteenth and the whole of the sixteenth centuries there were productions closely related to it in style and construction. Not only is the slow assimilation of the mass of heterogeneous elements

thrown together in these dramas not astonishing, but to the thoughtful student it must appear to be inevitable. On the one hand was the insatiable desire for voluptuous spectacle, for the lascivious pseudo-classicism of the pictorial dance, for the bewildering richness of movement which had originated in the earlier triumphal processions, and for the stupendous scenic apparatus made possible in the open air sacred plays. On the other was the widespread taste for part singing and the constantly growing skill of composers in adapting to secular ideas the polyphonic science of the church. Added to these elements was the imperative need of some method of imparting individuality of utterance to the principal characters in a play while at the same time strengthening their charm by the use of song.

For nearly a century, then, we find the lyric drama continuing to utilize the materials of

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the *sacra rappresentazione* as adapted to secular purposes by Poliziano, but with the natural results of the improvement in artistic device in music. It is not necessary here to enter into a detailed account of the growth of musical expression. Every student of the history of the art knows that many centuries were required to build up a technical praxis sufficient to enable composers to shape compositions in such a large form as the Roman Catholic mass. When the basic laws of contrapuntal technic had been codified, Josquin des Prés led the way to the production of music possessing a beauty purely musical. Then followed the next logical step, namely, the attempt to imitate externals. Such pieces as Jannequin's "Chant des Oiseaux" and Gombert's "Chasse du Lièvre" are examples of what was achieved in this direction. Finally, Palestrina demonstrated the scope of polyphonic music in the expression of religious



emotions at times bordering upon the dramatic in their poignancy.

We cannot well doubt that the Italians of the late sixteenth century felt the failure of their secular music to meet the demands of secular poetry as religious music was meeting those of the canticles of the church. The festal entertainments which had graced the marriages of princes had most of the machinery of opera, but they lacked the vital principle. They failed to become living art entities solely because they wanted the medium for the adequate publication of individuality. They made their march of a century on the very verge of the promised land, but they had to lose themselves in the bewitching wilderness of the madrigal drama before they found their Moses. It was the gradual growth of skill in musical expression that brought the way into sight, and that growth had to be effected by natural and logical processes, not

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by the discovery or by the world-moving genius of any one composer.

The Doric architecture of the frottola had to be developed into the Italian Renaissance style of the madrigal by the ripening of the craft of composers in adapting the music of ecclesiastical polyphony to the communication of worldly thought. Then the Renaissance style had to lose itself in the baroque struggles of the final period of the madrigal drama — struggles of artistic impulse against an impossible style of structure and the uncultivated taste of the auditors. Then and then only was the time for revolt and the revolt came.

In the meanwhile we may remark that the intense theatricalism of opera ought never to be a source of astonishment to any one who has studied the history of its origins. The supreme trait of the lyric drama of the fifteenth and sixteenth century was its spec-

tacular quality. The reforms of Galilei and Caccini were, as we shall see, aimed at this condition. Their endeavors to escape the contrapuntal music of the madrigal drama were the labors of men consciously confronting conditions which had been surely, if not boldly, moving toward their own rectification. The madrigal opera was intrinsically operatic, but it was not yet freed from the restrictions of impersonality from which its parent, the polyphony of the church, could not logically rid itself even with the aid of a Palestrina's genius. We must then follow this line of later development.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE PREDOMINANCE OF THE SPECTACULAR

**T**HROUGHOUT the fifteenth century the lyric drama of Italy continued to be a denizen of courts and to be saturated with what has been called the "passionate sensualism" of the Italian genius. The rivalry of lords, spiritual and temporal, of popes, of dukes and princes, in the luxury of their fêtes was a salient phenomenon of the time. The lyric drama became a field for gorgeous display and its pomp and circumstance included not only elegant song, but considerable assemblies of instruments, dazzling ballets, pantomimic exhibitions, elaborate stage machinery, imported singers and instrumentalists.

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As the painters had represented popes and potentates mingling with the holy family at the sacred manger, so the lyric dramatists assembled the gods and heroes of classic fable to do honor to Lorenzo and others of that glittering era.

In 1488 Bergonzo Botta, of Tortoni, prepared a festal play for the marriage of Galeazzo Sforza and Isabella of Arragon. Arteaga<sup>1</sup> quotes from Tristan Chalco, a Milanese historiographer, an account of this production. The entertainment took place in a great hall, which had a gallery holding many instrumental players. In the center of the hall was a bare table. As soon as the prince and princess had entered the spectacle began with the return of Jason and his companions who deposited the golden fleece on the table

<sup>1</sup> "Le Rivoluzioni del Teatro Musicale Italiano della sua Origine fino al Presente," by Stefano Arteaga. Venice, 1785.

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as a present. Mercury then appeared and related some of his adventures in Thessaly with Apollo. Next came Diana with her nymphs dragging a handsome stag. She gave the stag to the bridal pair and told a pretty story about his being the one into which she had changed the incautious Acteon. After Diana had retired the orchestra became silent and the tones of a lyre were heard. Then entered Orpheus who began his tale with the words, "I bewailed on the spires of the Apennines the unitmely death of my Euridice." But, as he explained, his song had changed as his heart had changed, and since Euridice was no more, he wished now to lay his homage at the feet of the most amiable Princess in the world. Orpheus was interrupted by the entrance of Atalanta and Theseus and a party of hunters, who brought the first part to an end in an animated dance.

The second part introduced Iris, Hebe,

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Pomona, Vertumnus, and choruses of Arcadians and others. This part concluded with a dance by gods of the sea and the Lombardian rivers. The third part began with the appearance of Orpheus leading Hymen, to whom he sang praises, accompanying himself on the lyre. Behind him were the Graces, in the midst of whom came "Marital Fidelity" and presented herself to the princess. After some other minor incidents of the same kind the spectacle came to an end with a ballet in which Bacchus, Silenus, Pan and a chorus of satyrs were principal figures. This lively and comic dance, says Chalco, "brought to an end the most splendid and astonishing spectacle that Italy had witnessed."

In 1487 Nicolo de Corregio Visconti produced at Ferrara his fable "Cephale et l'Aurore." In this there were choruses of nymphs, vows to Diana, dialogues between Corydon and Thyrsis and other pastoral dainties. At

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the carnival of 1506 at Urbino, Castiglione and his friend Cesare Gonzaga, of the great Mantuan family, recited the former's "Tirsi," dialogues in verse. The two interpreters wore pastoral costumes. The dialogue was couched in the customary pastoral phrase, but it was made plain that fulsome flattery of living personages was intended.<sup>1</sup> The musical numbers of which we can be certain were one solo, sung by Iola, a chorus of shepherds and a morris dance.

The impulse which brought the "Orfeo" into being had not yet exhausted itself and the Italians continued to feast their souls on a visionary Arcadia with which they vainly strove to mingle their own present. But love of luxurious display slowly transformed their pastorals into glittering spectacles. As for the music, we may be certain that in the

<sup>1</sup> "Poesie Volgari e Latine del Conte B. Castiglione." Rome, 1760.



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beginning it followed the lines laid down in the "Orfeo." It rested first on the basis of the frottola, but when the elegant and gracious madrigal provided an art form better suited to the opulence of the decorative features of the embryonic lyric drama, the madrigal became the dominating element in the music. Together with it we find in time the dance slowly assuming that shape which eventually became the foundation of the suite.

Adrian Willaert became chapel master of St. Mark's in 1527 and his influence in spreading the madrigal through Italy was so great that he has been called, as we have already noted, the father of that form of composition. Certain it is that, despite the earlier publications of Petrucci, the madrigal became dominant in Italy after the advent of Willaert. But we must not lose sight of the influence of Constanzo Festa, the earliest great Italian writer

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of madrigals, whose first book of these compositions (for three voices) was published in 1537. We are therefore to understand that in the plays about to be mentioned the madrigal style prevailed in the music.

In 1539 at the marriage of Cosimo I and Eleanora of Toledo there were two spectacular performances. In the first Apollo appeared in company with the muses. He sang stanzas glorifying the bride and her husband, and the muses responded with a canzona in nine parts. Now the cities of Tuscany entered, each accompanied by a symbolical procession, and sang their praises to the bride. The second entertainment was a prose comedy of Landi, preceded by a prologue and provided with five intermezzi. In the first intermezzo Aurora, in a blazing chariot, awakened all nature by her song. Then the Sun rose and by his position in the sky informed the audience what was the hour of each succeeding episode. In

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the final intermezzo Night brought back Sleep, who had banished Aurora, and the spectacle concluded with a dance of bacchantes and satyrs to instrumental music. The accounts which have come down to us note that the song of Aurora was accompanied by a gravicembalo, an organ, a flute, a harp and a large viol. For the song of Night four trombones were used to produce a grave and melancholy support. The music for this entertainment was composed by Francesco Corteccia, Constanzo Festa, Mattio Rampollini, Petrus Masconus and Baccio Moschini. All these musicians were composers of madrigals, and Corteccia was at the time Cosimo's chapel master. In this spectacle was heard the solo madrigal for Sileno already mentioned. Here is the opening of this piece; the upper voice was sung and the other voice parts were played as an accompaniment.

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1st Tenor

O bègli an - ni de l'o - ro

2d Tenor

O bègli an - ni de l'o - ro

3d Tenor

O bègli an - ni de . . . l'o - ro

Bass

O bègli an - ni de l'o - ro . .

O se - col di - vo al - hor

O se - col di - vo al - hor

O se - col di - vo, di - vo al - hor

. . . O se - col di - vo al - hor

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... non ras - tr'o fal - ce al - hor non e - ra

... non ras - tr'o fal - ce al - hor non e - ra

... non ras - tr'o fal - ce al - hor non e - ra

... non ras - tr'o fal - ce al - hor non e - ra

... vis - co ne lac - cio . . . e

... vis - co ne lac - cio e no'lrio

... vis - co ne . . lac - cio, ne lac - cio e

... vis - co ne lac - cio e no -

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no'lrio . . ferr' e'l . . to - sco etc.

ferr' el, ferr' e'l to - sco etc.

no'lrio ferr' e'l . . . to - sco etc.

. . . 'lrio ferr' - e'l . . to - sco etc.

In 1554 Beccari of Ferrara (1510-1590) produced his "Il Sacrificio," a genuine pastoral drama, in which the actors were Arcadian shepherds with Roman manners. The dialogues were connected by a series of dramatic actions, and the music was composed by Alfonso della Viola, a pupil of Willaert. Among the personages was a high priest who sang, like Poliziano's Orpheus, to the accompaniment of his own lyre. The same composer

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wrote choruses for Alberto Lollio's pastoral, "Aretusa" (1563) and several musical numbers for "Lo Sfortunato" by Agostino Argenti, of Ferrara (1571).

In 1574 on the occasion of the visit of Henri III to Venice, the doge ordered a performance of a piece called simply "Tragedia," which had choruses and some other music by the great Claudio Merulo, composer of the first definitely designed instrumental works. For the wedding festivities attendant upon the marriage of Francesco de Medicis and Bianca Capella in 1579 Gualterotti arranged a grand tournée in the interior court of the Pitti Palace at Florence. This entertainment was of a nature similar to that of 1539 above described. It was composed of mythologic episodes spectacularly treated. The verse was by Giovanni Rucellai, the distinguished author of "Rosamunda" and the "Api," and the music by Pietro Strozzi. One of the

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singers was a certain young Giulio Caccini,  
who lived to be famous.

Torquato Tasso's pastoral play "Aminta" (1573) had choruses though we cannot say who composed the music. It is known that Luzzasco Luzzaschi, pupil of Cyprian di Rore, master of Frescobaldi, and composer of madrigals and organ toccatas, wrote the chorals in madrigal style for Guarini's famous "Pastor Fido." There were choruses to separate the acts and two introduced in the action. These two, which had a kind of refrain, were the chorus of hunters in Act IV, scene sixth, and the chorus of priests and shepherds in Act V, scene third. There was also an episode in which a dance was executed to the music of a chorus sung behind the scenes.

In 1589, on the occasion of the marriage in Florence of the Grand Duke Ferdinand with Princess Christine of Lorraine, there was a festal entertainment under the general di-



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rection of Giovanni Bardi, Count of Vernio, at whose palace afterward met the founders of modern opera. Indeed, the members of the young Florentine coterie were generally concerned in this fête and doubtless found much to move them toward their new conception. The Count of Vernio's comedy "Amico Fido" was played and was accompanied by six spectacular intermezzi with music. The first of these was by Ottavio Rinuccini, author of "Dafne" and "Euridice," usually called the first operas. It was named the "Harmony of the Spheres," and its music was composed by Emilio del Cavaliere (originator of the modern oratorio) and the chapel master Cristoforo Malvezzi. The second intermezzo dealt with a contest in song between the daughters of Pierus and the muses. The judges were hamadryads and the defeated mortals were punished for their presumption. The text was by Rinuccini and the music by

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Luca Marenzio, the famous madrigalist. The contesting singers were accompanied by lutes and viols, while their judges had the support of harps, lyres, viols and other instruments of the same family.

Bardi himself devised the third intermezzo, Rinuccini wrote the verse and Bardi and Marenzio the music. It had some of the essential features of both ballet and opera and represented the victory of Apollo over the python. The god descended from the skies to the music of viols, flutes and trombones. Later when he celebrated his victory and the acclaiming Greeks surrounded him, lutes, trombones, harps, viols and a horn united with the voices. Strozzi wrote the fourth intermezzo with music by Caccini. This carried the audience into both supernal and infernal regions and its music, somber and imposing, called for an orchestra of viols, lutes, lyres of all forms, double harps, trombones and organ.

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The fifth intermezzo must have rivaled the glories of the ancient sacred plays in the public squares. Rinuccini arranged it from the story of Arion. The theater, so we are told, represented a sea dotted with rocks and from many of these spouted springs of living water. At the foot of the mountains in the background floated little ships. Amphitrite entered in a car drawn by two dolphins and accompanied by fourteen tritons and fourteen naiads. Arion arrived in a ship with a crew of forty. When he had precipitated himself into the sea he sang a solo accompanied by a harp, not by a lyre as in the ancient fable. When the avaricious sailors thought him engulfed forever, they sang a chorus of rejoicing, accompanied by oboes, bassoons, cornets and trombones. The music of this intermezzo was by Malvezzi, who was a distinguished madrigalist. The last intermezzo was also arranged by Rinuccini and its music

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was by Cavaliere. In this the poet divided the muses into three groups, in order to give antiphonal effect to their songs. He combined the episodes so as to furnish the musician with the motives for a dance and in a manner permit of the use of numerous and varied instruments, from the organ to the Spanish guitar. Probably this ballet morceau was one of the first of many medleys of national character dances so familiar now to the operatic stage.<sup>1</sup>

The published text of these creations shows

<sup>1</sup> This account is taken from Bastiano de' Rossi's "Descrizione dell' apparato e degli intermedi fatti per la commedia rappresentata in Firenze nelle nozze del serenissimo D. Ferdinando Medici," etc. Firenze, 1589. This work is not in any of the great libraries and is here quoted from the previously mentioned history of M. Chouquet, who had access to it in the private library of an Italian scholar. The voice and instrumental part-books were edited by Malvezzi, and published at Venice in 1591 under the title "Intermedii e concerti, fatti per la commedia rappresentata in Firenze nelle nozze del Ferdinando Medici e Madama Cristiana di Lorena." Malvezzi's edition contains valuable notes and an instructive preface.

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that they contain much that rests on the traditions of the lyric drama as it had been known in Italy for a century, while there is also a little that approaches the new style then in process of development. This is not strange, indeed, since several of the men most deeply interested in the search after the ancient Greek declamation were active in the preparation of this entertainment. Nevertheless we learn from Malvezzi's publication that the pieces were all written in the madrigal style, frequently in numerous voice parts. The entire orchestra was employed in company with the voices only in the heavier numbers.

It is plain that in these musical plays there was no attempt at complete setting of the text. There was no union of the lyrics by any sort of recitative. The first Italian to write anything of this kind in a play seems to have been Cavaliere, but unfortunately his "*Il Satiro*" (1590) and "*La Disperazione di Si-*

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leno" (1595) are known to us only through a comment of Doni, who censures them for pedantic affectations and artificialities of style, inimical to the truth of dramatic music. The dates of the production of these works show us that they were not as old as the movement toward real monodic song, and it is certain that in France, at any rate, the Italian Balthazarini had already brought out in 1581 a ballet-opera, "Le Ballet Comique de la Reine," which contained real vocal solos. At the same time the evidence is conclusive that the madrigal was acquiring general popularity as a form of dramatic music, and the madrigal drama reached the zenith of its glory at the very moment when its fate was preparing in the experiments of Galilei and others in the new monodic style destined to become the basis of modern Italian opera.

## CHAPTER XII

### INFLUENCE OF THE TASTE FOR COMEDY

**A**N illuminative fact in the history of the madrigal drama is the growth of the comic element. Poliziano's dream of Arcadia was perhaps neither deep nor passionate, but it was at any rate serious and for some time after its production the lyric drama aspired to the utterance of high sentiments. But the incongruous mingling of Arcadian shepherds and shepherdesses with the gods and heroes of the classic literature in a series of musical actions, conceived with the desire to gratify that passionate sensuality which governed Italian thought, was sure in time to lead the typical insincerity and satiric view-point of the Italian mind to the delights of physical realism,

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and the free publication of mocking comment. Photographic musical imitations of the noises of battles, the songs of birds and the cries of a great city were certain to be succeeded by the adaptation to the uses of dramatic action of the musical means developed in these and this adaptation led the way directly into the realm of the comic lyric drama.

The pomp and circumstance of the gorgeous spectacles which we examined in the preceding chapter were cherished by the traditions of the Italian court stage and were not obliterated even in the new species of lyric comedy. But there was far less to dazzle the eye in the comic performances, and even in this they offered a certain novelty to the consideration of Italian audiences. The court spectacles, to be sure, did not go out of existence. We meet them in all their brilliancy in the early years of the seventeenth century, and at the same time we find them copied in



a somewhat modified form in the spectacular productions of the young Italian opera houses. On the other hand, when the Florentine coterie created dramatic recitative, it was to use it in a drama wholly serious and poetic in purpose. It was not till some years later that recitative acquired sufficient flexibility to fit itself into the plan of the rapidly growing opera buffa. Yet even in this lyric species we discern something of the large influence of the humorous madrigal play, for in time the comic opera and the ballet spectacle both found homes after public opera houses had been thrown open to an eager public. Physical realism, the humors of the streets and satiric assaults upon the life of the courts made excellent materials for the entertainment of the Italian mind, especially at such a time as the close of the sixteenth century, when the country had reached the completion of that state described by Symonds:

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“ The intellectual and social life of the Italians, though much reduced in vigor, was therefore still, as formerly, concentrated in cities marked by distinct local qualities and boastful of their ancient glories. The courts of Ferrara and Urbino continued to form centers for literary and artistic coteries. Venice remained the stronghold of mental unrestraint and moral license, where thinkers uttered their thoughts with tolerable freedom and libertines indulged their tastes unhindered. Rome early assumed novel airs of piety, and external conformity to austere patterns became the fashion here. Yet the Papal capital did not wholly cease to be the resort of students and artists. The universities maintained themselves in a respectable position — far different, indeed, from that which they had held in the last century, yet not ignoble. Much was being learned on many lines of study divergent from those prescribed by earlier humanists. Padua, in particular, distinguished itself for medical researches. This was the flourishing time, moreover, of Academies in which, notwithstanding nonsense

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talked and foolish tastes indulged, some solid work was done for literature and science. The names of the Cimento, Della Crusca and Palazzo Vernio at Florence remind us of not unimportant labors in physics, in the analysis of language, and in the formation of a new dramatic style of music. At the same time the resurgence of popular literature and the creation of popular theatrical types deserved to be particularly noticed. It is as though the Italian nation at this epoch, suffocated by Spanish etiquette and poisoned by Jesuitical hypocrisy, sought to expand healthy lungs in free spaces of open air, indulging in dialectical niceties and immortalizing street jokes by the genius of masked comedy."

We shall perceive, then, in the productions of some representative masters of the madrigal drama in the latter half of the sixteenth century, an expression of this Italian eagerness to abandon even the external attitude of serious contemplation, which the spectacular delights of the intermezzi and the serious lyric

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drama had made at least tolerable, and to turn to the uses of pure amusement the materials of a clearly defined form of art. We shall find the dramatization of the chatter of the street and the apparition of types familiar to the farcical comedies and operas bouffes of later days. In the washerwomen of Striggio we are not far from *Madame Angot*, and some of the personages whom Vecchi humorously treated in his "Amfiparnaso" are treading the stage of to-day. In these madrigal dramas, as we shall see, the attempts to overcome the musical unsuitability of polyphonic music to the purposes of dramatic dialogue led composers further and further from the truth which had stood at the elbows of Poliziano's contemporaries and immediate successors. Musicians went forward with the madrigal till they found themselves in Vecchi's day confronted with a genuine *reductio ad absurdum*. It was only at this time that the experiments of the Floren-

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tines uncovered the profound musical law that the true dramatic dialogue is to be carried on by single-voiced melodies resting on a basis of chord harmony.

In the meantime, we must delay our approach to the golden era of the madrigal drama (when indeed it faced that *reductio*) to look for a moment at the representative work of a Mantuan master of the lyric comedy. Alessandro Striggio, born in Mantua, about 1535, died in the same city in 1587, was for a time in the service of Cosimo, but for at least fifteen years of his life was known simply as a "gentleman of Mantua." Striggio was one of the most active and talented of the composers of his time, and his creations are found in both religious and secular fields. He utilized instruments freely in connection with voices and his works give an excellent insight into the general condition of vocal composition in Italy in his day. He be-

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came prominent as one of the early composers of intermezzi and he was employed also to write church music for wedding festivals. One of his motets calls for an orchestra of eight trombones, eight violas, eight large flutes, a spinet and a large lute. Without doubt his most significant work in the domain of the lyric drama was "*Il Calamento delle Donne al Bucato*," published at Florence in 1584.

This is a series of rustic scenes, of which the first begins with an introductory recitation by the poet, set for four voices: "In the gentle month of May I found myself by chance near a clear stream where some troops of women in various poses washed their white linen, and when they had spread it to the sun on the grass, they chattered thus in lively repartee, laughing." Then begin the action and the dialogue. The scenario may be set forth in this wise: boisterous saluta-

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tions, hilarious talk and accounts of flirtations; tittle tattle about neighbors and lively scandals; exchange of commiserations on the insupportable humor of masters and the fatigue of service; cessation of laughing, kissing and shouting, the day being ended; quick change of scene to a levee of washing mallets; one of the women steals a trinket from another, and a general riot ensues, after which there is a reconciliation as the sun goes down and the women disperse with embraces, tender words and cries of adieu.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Something suggestive of a similar train of musical thought is found in some reflections of George Moore on Zola: "I had read the 'Assomoir,' and had been much impressed by its pyramid size, strength, height and decorative grandeur, and also by the immense harmonic development of the idea; and the fugal treatment of the different scenes had seemed to me astonishingly new—the washhouse, for example: the fight motive is indicated, then follows the development of side issues, then comes the fight motive explained; it is broken off short, it flutters through a web of progressive detail, the fight motive is again taken up, and now it is worked out in all its fulness; it is worked up to *crescendo*, another side issue is introduced, and again the theme is given forth." ("Confessions of a Young Man.")

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One can have no difficulty in imagining how this story, furnished as it must have been, with some very free action, was set to music in the madrigal style. The contrast of moods provides an excellent background for variety of musical movement and for a generous exercise of the expressional skill which the composers of that period had acquired. Lovers of the ballet of action will perceive that the scenario of Striggio's musical comedy could also serve perfectly for that of a suite of pantomimic dances.

Nor can the reader fail to discern in this story some of the germs of the opera buffa. What is lacking here, to wit, the advancing of some individual characters from the choral mass to the center of the stage, was better accomplished in the earlier or more serious works. The Orpheus of Poliziano was doubtless a striking figure in the minds of the Mantuan audience of 1484. While perhaps there



was a distinct decline in directness of expression in the attempts of later lyric dramatists, the departure was possibly not as large in the case of the serious writers as in that of the humorists. We shall in all likelihood better understand this after a survey of the labors of the dominant figure of the artistic period of the humorous madrigal drama.

## CHAPTER XIII

### VECCHI AND THE MATURED MADRIGAL DRAMA

THE fully developed madrigal drama of the latter years of the sixteenth century was an art form entirely dissimilar to anything known to the modern stage, and, as we shall presently see, it was in itself a frank confession of utter confusion in the search for a musical means of individual expression. If no other evidence were at hand, the works of Vecchi would be sufficient to prove that the logical progress of the medieval lyric drama in one direction had led it into the very mazes of the polyphonic wilderness. This new form lacked the spectacular glories of the really operatic shows described in Chapter XI

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and it abandoned even their ways of voicing the utterances of individual characters. Much misinformation concerning this madrigal drama has been disseminated by the comfortable process of repeating without scrutiny errors early fastened upon histories of music.

The master spirit of the madrigal drama was Orazio Vecchi, born about 1551 at Modena. He became a priest and was canon of Corregio in 1586 and in 1591 deacon. He became chapel master at the cathedral of Modena in 1596 and after numerous vicissitudes died in 1605. His most important work was "L'Amfiparnaso, commedia harmonica," performed at Modena in 1594. This has been preserved in its entirety, together with the author's preface, from which valuable information may be gathered. The work is an attempt to turn into a lyric form the "Commedia dell' Arte," enacted in early times at

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village fairs in northern Italy. The characters are Arlecchino, Pantalone, Doctor Graziano, Brighella, Isabella, Lelio and others. The story of the play, however, does not concern us so much as the author's artistic purposes and the methods by which he sought to achieve them. In the addresses to the reader prefixed to his scores Vecchi states some of his artistic beliefs. He says:

“The gross jests, which are found in the comedies of our time, and which are their meat rather than the spice, are the reasons why he who says ‘Comedy’ seems to speak of a buffoon’s pastime. They wrong themselves who give to such gracious poesy a sense so unworthy. True comedy, properly regarded, has for its object the representation in divers personages of almost all the actions of familiar life. To hold the mirror up to human life it bestows attention no less upon the useful than upon the pleasing, and it does not suffice it to raise a laugh.” (“Amfiparnaso.”)

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"It will be said that it is contrary to convention to mingle serious music with that which is merely pleasing and that one thus brings discredit on the profession. But the pleasing and the serious according to report have been mingled from father to son. Aristotle says so; Homer and Virgil give examples." ("Veglie di Siena," 1604.)

"I know full well that at first view some will be able to judge my artistic caprices low and flimsy, but they ought to know that it requires as much grace, art and nature to draw well a rôle of comedy as to represent a wise old grumbler." ("Selva di Varia Ricreatione," 1590.)

"Everything has a precise meaning, and the actor should try to find it; and, that done, to express it well and intelligently in such a way as to give life to the work." ("Amfiparnaso.")

"The moral intention of it will be less than that of the simple comedy, for music applies itself to the passion rather than to the reason, and hence I have been compelled to use reflective elements with moderation. Moreover,

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the action has less scope for development, spoken words being more rapid than song; so it is expedient to condense, to restrict, to suppress details, and to take only the capital situations. The imagination ought to supply the rest." ("Amfiparnaso.")

When we turn to the drama itself to ascertain how the composer embodied his artistic ideas, we find that the score shows a series of scenes containing speeches for single personages and dialogues for two or more. All of these are set to madrigal music in five parts. This music exhibits much variety of style and expressive power. The composer was undoubtedly a master of his material. How intricate and yet pictorial his style can become may be seen in these four measures from Act I, scene second, which contain words uttered by Lelio.

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Che vo - le - te voi dir

Che vo - le - te voi

This system consists of five staves. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef with a common time signature (C). It contains the melody for the first phrase. The second and third staves are empty. The fourth staff is a vocal line in treble clef with a common time signature (C), containing the melody for the second phrase. The fifth staff is empty.

an - i - ma mi - - -

Che

dir a - ni - ma mi -

Che vo - le - te voi dir

This system consists of five staves. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef with a common time signature (C). It contains the melody for the first phrase. The second staff is empty. The third staff is a vocal line in treble clef with a common time signature (C), containing the melody for the second phrase. The fourth staff is empty. The fifth staff is a vocal line in treble clef with a common time signature (C), containing the melody for the third phrase.

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a Col don di quel . . .

vo - le - te voi dir a -

a Col don di quel Nar -

a - ni - ma mi - a . . .

. . . Nar - ci - so a - ni - ma

- ni - ma mi - a Col

Che vo - le - te voi dir

ci - so Col

. . . Col don di quel . . . Nar -



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That the composer sometimes employed skillfully the contrast of pure chord sequence is seen in his setting of the "tag" of the play spoken by Lelio and beginning thus:

The image displays a musical score for a madrigal setting, consisting of five staves. The first four staves each contain a line of music with the lyrics "E voi cor - te - si etc." written below. The fifth staff is empty. The music is written in a simple, early modern style, with notes and rests on a five-line staff. The lyrics are written in a simple, early modern style, with hyphens indicating syllables across notes. The first staff is in treble clef, and the subsequent staves are in bass clef. The key signature is one flat (B-flat). The time signature is not explicitly shown, but the music is in a common time signature (C).

E voi cor - te - si etc.

E voi cor - te - si etc.

E voi cor - te - si etc.

E voi cor - te - si etc.

Interesting as this music is in itself, the temptation to enter upon a prolonged examination of the score must be resisted for the good reason that a more important matter demands our attention. It has often been

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stated that in the madrigal drama, when the musician wished a single personage to speak, that character sang his part in the madrigal while alone on the stage and the other parts were sung behind the scenes. This error has persistently clung to musical history, despite the fact that it was long ago exposed by European authors who ought to have commanded more consideration. The present writer is indebted to Romain Rolland for guidance in his examination into this matter.

Vecchi had an enthusiastic disciple in Adriano Banchieri, born at Bologna in 1567 and died in the same city in 1634. Although he was a pupil of Giuseppe Guami, organist of St. Mark's, himself an organist of St. Michele in Bologna, and a serious theoretician, he was none the less the author of several comedies and satires, which he wrote under the pseudonym of Camillo Scaligeri della Fratta. He states in the title page that his comedy, "Il

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Studio Dilettevole" (for three voices) produced in 1603, is after the manner of Vecchi's "Amfiparnaso." His "Saggezia Giovenile," produced somewhat later, is equipped with a preface containing full directions as the method of performing a madrigal drama. He says:

"Before the music begins one of the singers will read in a loud voice the title of the scene, the names of the personages and the argument."

"The place of the scene is a chamber of moderate size, as well closed as possible (for the quality of the sound). In an angle of the room are placed two pieces of carpet on the floor and a pleasing scene. Two chairs are placed, one at the right, the other at the left. Behind the scene are benches for the singers, which are turned toward the public and separated from one another by the breadth of a palm. Behind these is an orchestra of lutes, clavicembali, and other instruments, in tune with the voices. From above the scene falls

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a large curtain which shuts off the singers and instrumentalists; the rule of procedure will be according to the following order:

“The invisible singers read the music from their parts. They will be three at a time, or better, six, two sopranos, two tenors, one alto and one bass, singing or remaining silent according to the occasion, giving with spirit the lively words and with feeling the sentimental ones and pronouncing all with loud and intelligible voices according to the judgment of prudent singers.”

“The actors alone on the scene, and reciting, should prepare their parts so as to know them by heart and in every detail of place and time follow the music with all care as to time. It will not be a bad idea to have a prompter to aid the singers, instrumentalists and reciters.”

The words, carefully chosen by the writer, prove conclusively that the actors did not sing; they spoke. The only music was that which came from behind the curtain at the rear.

Further directions for the performance of a madrigal drama by Vecchi tell us that when

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a single person speaks on the stage, all the musical parts join in representing him. In the case of a dialogue between two actors the voices are to be divided into two groups situated so that the musical sounds shall seem to proceed from the actors. For example, when Lucio and Isabella converse, men's voices represent the former and women's voices the latter. The subjoined passage of dialogue between Frulla and Isabella, Act II, scene fifth, will show how two voices were represented:

Frulla (Men's voices): Ah Is-a - bel - la che fa - i ?

Isabella (Women's voices): Ah Is-a-bel-la che fa . . .

Frulla (Men's voices): Ah Is-a-bel - la che fa - i ?

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Ah no per-che Ah no Ah no perche tuc-  
i ? Ah no per-che Ah no per-che tuc-  
Ah no per-che Ah no perche tuc-

Deh la - scia - mi  
Deh la - scia - mi  
ci - di Deh la - scia - mi  
ci - di  
ci - di

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In the "Fidi Amanti" of Torelli there is a scene for two men, a satyr and a shepherd, and one woman, a nymph. In this the two men are represented always by the tenor and the bass, the latter having the chief burden of the delineation of the satyr. The soprano and alto voices are reserved for the nymph. Yet in this scene whenever the emotion becomes intense, whether sad or joyous, the four voices unit in singing the principal phrase.

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Rolland, with his customary acumen, notes that in Vecchi's five part madrigals for the stage the employment of the odd voice is plainly governed by musical needs. It has to be common to both personages in a scene for two and hence it is always the least characteristic voice. Its chief business is to fill in the harmony.

It is not essential to the purpose of this work that the story of "L'Amfiparnaso" or any of the other important madrigal dramas should be told. The significant points are the disappearance of the more gorgeous elements of spectacle found in the older court shows, the rise to prominence of the comic element, and above all the entire obliteration of the tentative methods of solo song found in the earlier lyric drama. The old-fashioned *cantori a liuti* sank into obscurity as the madrigal grew in general favor in Italy, and in the latter years of the sixteenth century their art seems to have



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undergone alterations quite in keeping with the growing complexity of madrigal forms. The madrigal was now the solo form with an instrumental accompaniment made from the under voices, and this solo form was not used in the madrigal drama. Its musicians had laid aside the "recitar alla lira," so much praised by Castiglione in 1514, and were seeking for some new way of setting solo utterance to music. The method chosen by Vecchi must appear to us to be removed from possibilities of artistic success still further than the solo adaptations of frottole, yet the historical fact is that his "Amfiparnaso" had an extraordinary popularity and set a fashion.

Some of Vecchi's works were produced and met with favor even after the pseudo-Hellenic invention of the Bardi fraternity had burst upon Italy. Indeed the madrigal drama died hard and its final burial was not accomplished till the opera had begun to take shape more

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definite than that found in the experimental productions of its founders. With the declining years of this curious form we need not concern ourselves. We may now turn to a consideration of the experiments which led to the creation of dramatic recitative, the missing link in the primeval world of the lyric drama.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE SPECTACULAR ELEMENT IN MUSIC

**W**HILE the madrigal drama was in the ripeness of its glory the young Florentine coterie which brought the opera to birth was engaged in its experiments with monody. The history of its labors has been told in many books and need not be repeated here. But connected with it are certain important facts which are too often overlooked or at best denied their correct position in the story.

In the first place, then, let us remind ourselves that while the madrigal drama was utilizing in a novel manner the musical form from which it took its name, the method of adapting the madrigal to solo purposes had

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never been abandoned. The singular path of development followed by the musical drama had been leading away from its true goal, that of solo utterance, but the Italian salon still heard the charms of the madrigal arranged as a lyric for single voice.

The first secular drama, the "Orfeo" of Poliziano, was equipped with the elements from which might have been evolved quickly all the materials of the first experimental operas; but the rapid spread of the polyphonic music through Italy and the sudden and overwhelming popularity of part singing soon, as we have seen, relegated the first suggestions of a manner of setting vocal solos for the stage into a position of comparative obscurity and in the end this possibility was conquered by the cumbrous method of Vecchi. Perhaps the unsuitability of polyphonic composition might have made itself clear earlier than it did, had not the general state of Italian

thought and taste moved in a direction making this impossible. The noble classic figure of Orpheus, with his flowing white robe, his simple fillet on his brow, and his lyre in his arm, standing before the iron gates and moving by his song the powers of hell, soon gave way to the gorgeous exhibitions in which the splendors of Night and Dawn were made the subjects of a series of glittering scenes enveloping a plan much like that of some modern ballet spectacle.

Throughout the sixteenth century, as we have seen, these court representations grew in complexity of pictorial detail, while the importance of the development of a medium for individual expression sank further and further out of notice. One reads of occasional uses of the old method of solo recitation to the lyre, but never as a controlling motive in the dramatic construction. It appears only as an incident in the general medley of sensuous al-

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lurements. So, too, the convocation of masses of singers, dancers and instrumentalists seems to have been nothing more than a natural demonstration of that growing appetite for luxury which characterized the approach of the feeble intellectual era of the Seicentisti, that era in which "ecclesiastical intolerance had rendered Italy nearly destitute of great men."

These quoted words are Symonds's; let him speak still further: "Bruno burned, Vanini burned, Carnescchi burned, Paleario burned, Bonfadio burned; Campanella banished after a quarter of a century's imprisonment with torture; the leaders of free religious thought in exile, scattered over northern Europe. Tasso, worn out with misery and madness, rested at length in his tomb on the Janiculan; Scarpi survived the stylus of the Roman curia with calm inscrutability at St. Fosca; Galileo meditated with closed lips in his watch tower behind Bello Squardo. With Michael Angelo

in 1564, Palladio in 1580, Tintoretto in 1594, the godlike lineage of the Renaissance artists ended; and what children of the sixteenth century still survived to sustain the nation's prestige, to carry on its glorious traditions? The list is but a poor one. Marino, Tassoni, the younger Buonarroti, Boccacini and Chiabrera in literature. The Bolognese academy in painting. After these men expand arid wildernesses of the Sei Cento — barocco architecture, false taste, frivolity, grimace, affectation — Jesuitry translated into false culture."

Symonds is here speaking of the dawn of the seventeenth century, but the movement toward these conditions is quite clearly marked in the later years of the preceding cycle. Its influence on the lyric drama is manifest in the multiplication of luxurious accessories and superficial splendors, designed to appeal to the taste of nobles plunged in sensuous extravagances and easily mistaking

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delight in them for a lofty appreciation of the drama and art. The reform of the Florentine coterie conquered Italy for less than fifty years. The return to showy productions, to the congregation of purely theatric effects, scenic as well as musical, was swift, and the student of operatic art can to-day discern with facility that the invention of the Florentines was soon reduced to the state of a thread to bind together episodes of pictorial and vocal display. But in the beginning it was unquestionably the outcome of a hostility to these very things, or at any rate to their merely spectacular employment.

Peri, Caccini, Bardi and others of the Florentine "camerata" were engaged as composers, stage managers, actors and singers in many of the elaborate court spectacles, intermezzi and madrigal dramas produced toward the end of the sixteenth century. Peri and Caccini were professional singers, and their



experiences were not only those of students, but also those of practitioners. Their revolt against the contrapuntal lyric drama was largely, though not wholly, based on deep-seated objection to the unintelligibility of the text. It does not require profound consideration to bring us to the opinion that the method of Vecchi was in part an attempt to overcome the innate defect of the polyphonic style in this matter of intelligibility. The resort to the spoken text on the stage while the music was sung behind the scenes appears on the face of it to have been compelled by a wish for some method of conveying the meaning of the poet to the audience.

Why, then, did not these young reformers find at hand in the madrigal arranged for solo voice the suggestion for their line of lyric reconstruction? Partly by reason of the confusion caused by obedience to old polyphonic customs in making the accompaniments, and

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partly because the madrigal had become a field for the display of vocal agility. Already the development of colorature singing had reached a high degree of perfection. Already the singer sought to astonish the hearer by covering an air with a bewildering variety of ornaments. The time was not far off when the opera prima donna was to become the incarnation of the artistic sensuousness which had beguiled Italy with a dream of Grecian resurrection. The way had been well built, for the attention of the fathers of the Roman church had been turned early to the necessity of system in the delivery of the liturgical chants. The study of a style had developed a technic and to the achievement of vocal feats this technic had been incited by the rapid rise of the act of descant.

Hand in hand the technic and the art of descant had come down the years. The sharp distinction early made between "contrapunc-

tus a penna" and "contrapunctus a mente" showed that composers and singers to a certain degree actually stood in rivalry in their production of passage work for voices. The rapid expansion of the florid element in the polyphonic music of the composers indicates to us that the improvised descant of the singer had a sensible influence. We need not be astonished, then, to learn that long before the end of the sixteenth century a very considerable knowledge of what was later systematized as the so-called "Italian method" had been acquired. The registers of head and chest were understood, breathing was studied, the hygiene of the voice was not a stranger, and vocalizes on all the vowels and for all the voices had been written. Numerous singers had risen to note, and the records show that their distinction rested not only on the beauty of their voices and the elegance of their singing, but also on their ability to perform those in-

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strumental feats which have from that time to this been dear to the colorature singer and to the operatic public.

In the closing years of the sixteenth century we find that the famous singers were heard not oftener in public entertainments than in private assemblies. Occasionally a madrigal arranged as a solo figured in a lyric play, but the singing of madrigals for one voice was a popular field for the exhibition of the powers of celebrated prima donnas such as Vittoria Archilei and eminent tenors like Jacopo Peri. Kiesewetter<sup>1</sup> gives a madrigal sung as a solo by Archilei. The supporting parts of the composition were transferred from voices to instruments apparently with little trouble. Mme. Archilei herself played the lute and her husband, Antonio Archilei, and Antonio Nalda played two chitarroni. The music of the madrigal was composed by

<sup>1</sup> "Schicksale und Beschaffenheit des Weltlichen Gesanges," by R. G. Kiesewetter. Leipsic, 1841.

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Signor Archilei. Here are the opening measures of this lyric:

Dal - le ce - le - sti sfe - re

Dal - le ce - le - sti sfe - - re

Dal - le ce - le - sti sfe - re

Dal - le ce - le - sti sfe - - re

di ce - le - ste Si - re - - -

di ce - le - ste Si - re - - -

di ce - le - ste Si - re -

di ce - le - ste Si - re - -

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Four staves of musical notation, each with a vocal line and a corresponding lyric line. The lyrics are 'ne' and 'etc.' repeated for each staff. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and accidentals.

ne etc.

ne etc.

ne etc.

ne etc.

Here is the beginning of the composition as Mme. Archilei decorated it with her extraordinary skill in the vocal ornamensation of the period:

Two staves of musical notation, each with a vocal line and a corresponding lyric line. The lyrics are 'Dal - le più al te' and 'sfe - re . . . dal-le più al - -'. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and accidentals.

Dal - le più al te

sfe - re . . . dal-le più al - -

# Spectacular Element in Music 219



We are told that despite the fine professions of the Florentines, Mme. Archilei was permitted to embroider Peri's *Euridice* in something like this fashion. But we must admit that even in those days a prima donna had power, and that something had to be conceded to popular taste. Furthermore, we shall see that the Florentines did not purpose to abolish floridity entirely.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE MEDIUM FOR INDIVIDUAL UTTERANCE

A CLOSER examination of the musical reforms instituted by the camerata which met at the Vernio and Corsi palaces will convince us that they were directed toward two objects; first, the restoration of the Greek method of delivering the declamation of a drama, and second, the reduction of purely lyric forms to a rational musical basis on which could be built intelligible settings of texts. The revolt was not only against polyphonic music in which text was treated without regard for its communicative purpose, but also against the decorative manner of solo singing, which made words only backgrounds for



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arabesques of sound. On this point we have the conclusive evidence of Caccini's own words as found in the preface to his "*Nuove Musiche*."<sup>1</sup> He begins by giving the reasons why he had not earlier published his lyrics in the new style, though they had long been sung. He continues:

"But when I now see many of these pieces torn apart and altered in form, when I see to what evil uses the long runs are put, to wit, those consisting of single and double notes (repeated ones), as if both kinds were combined, and which were invented by me in order to do away with the former old fashion of introduced passages, which were for wind or stringed instruments rather than the human voice; when further I see how dynamic gradations of tone are used without discrimination, what enunciation now is, and how trills, gruppetti and other ornaments are introduced, I consider it necessary — and in this I am up-

<sup>1</sup> "*Nuove Musiche di Giulio Caccini detto Romano*." Florence, 1601.

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held by my friends — to have my music printed.”

Furthermore he will explain in this preface the principles which led him to write in this manner for the solo voice. He says that for a long time he has been a member of the Florentine circle of cultivated men and that he has learned from them more than he acquired in thirty years in the schools of counterpoint.

“For these wise and noble personages have constantly strengthened me and with most lucid reasons determined me to place no value upon that music which makes it impossible to understand the words and thus to destroy the unity and meter, sometimes lengthening the syllables, sometimes shortening them in order to suit the counterpoint — a real mangling of the poetry — but to hold fast to that principle so greatly extolled by Plato and other philosophers: ‘Let music be first of all language and rhythm and secondly tone,’ but not vice versa,

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and moreover to strive to force music into the consciousness of the hearer and create there those impressions so admirable and so much praised by the ancients, and to produce which modern music through its counterpoint is impotent. Especially true is this of solo singing with the accompaniment of a stringed instrument when the words are not understood because of the immoderate introduction of passages."

This, he declares, can only extort applause of the "crowd" and such music can only result in mere tickling of the ear, because when the text is not intelligible there can be no appeal to the understanding.

"The idea came to me to introduce a style of music which makes it possible in a certain manner to speak musically by employing, as already said, a certain noble subordination of the song, with now and then some dissonances, while however holding the chord by means of the sustained bass, except when I follow the already common custom of assign-

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ing the middle voices to the accompanying instrument for the purpose of increasing the effect, for which purpose alone they are, in my opinion, appropriate."

He now tells us that, after he found that his principle stood the tests of practice and he was satisfied that in the new style lay a power to touch hearts far beyond that possessed by polyphony, he wrote certain madrigals for the solo voice in the manner described, which manner "I hereafter used for the representations in Florence." Then he went to Rome where the dilettanti, particularly Lione Strozzi, gathered at the house of Nero Neri, expressed themselves enthusiastically about the new revelation of the power of solo song to move the heart. These amateurs became convinced that there was no longer any satisfaction to be drawn from the old way of singing the soprano part of madrigals and turning the other parts into an instrumental accompaniment.

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Caccini went back to Florence and continued to set canzonettas. He says that in these compositions he tried continually to give the meaning of the words and so to touch responsive chords of feeling. He endeavored to compose in a pleasing style by hiding all contrapuntal effects as much as possible. He set long syllables to consonances and let passing notes go with short syllables. He applied similar considerations to the introduction of passages "although sometimes as a certain ornamentation I have used a few broken notes to the value of a quarter, or at most a half note, on a short syllable, something one can endure, because they quickly slip by and are not really passages, but only add to the pleasant effect."

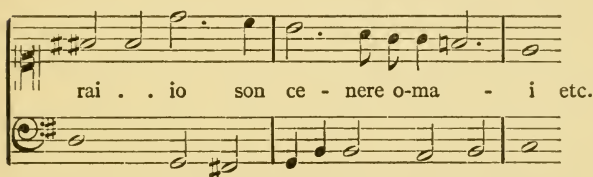
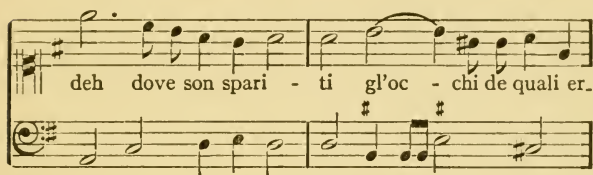
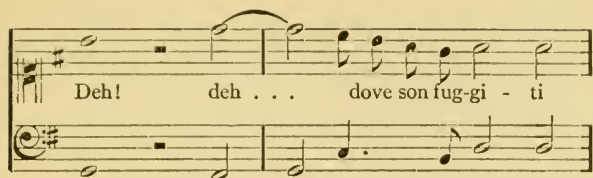
Caccini continues his preface with reiterated objections to vocal passages used merely for display, and says that he has striven to show how they can be turned to artistic uses.

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He deprecates the employment of contrapuntal device for its own sake, and says that he employs it only infrequently and to fill out middle voices. He forcefully condemns all haphazard use of vocal resources and says that the singer should labor to penetrate the meaning and passion of that which he sings and to convey it to the hearer. This he asserts can never be accomplished by the delivery of passages.

Here, then, we have a clear statement of the artistic ideals cherished by Caccini, and these, we may take it, were shared by the other members of the camerata who were engaged in the pursuit of a method of direct, eloquent, dramatic solo expression. The opening measures of one of the numbers in the "*Nuove Musiche*" will serve to show in what manner Caccini developed his theories in practice and equally what close relation this style had to that of the new dramatic recitative.

# Medium for Individual Utterance 227



In the preface to his score of "Euridice" Peri has set forth his ideas about recitative. He has told us how he tried to base its movement upon that of ordinary speech, using few tones and calm movements for quiet conversation and more extended intervals and animated movement for the delineation of emotion. This was founded upon the same basis

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as the theory of Caccini, which condemned emphatically the indiscriminate employment of swelled tones, exclamatory emphases and other vocal devices. Caccini desired that the employment of all these factors in song should be regulated by the significance of the text. In other words these reformers were fighting a fight not unlike that of Wagner. They deplored the making of vocal ornaments and the display of ingenuity in the interweaving of parts for their own sakes, just as Wagner decried the writing of tune for tune's sake, and on one of the same grounds, namely, that nothing could result but a tickling of the ear. Yet these young reformers had no intention of throwing overboard all the charms of floridity in song. Here are two examples of their treatment of passionate utterance in recitative. The first is by Peri and the second by Caccini. Both are settings of the same text in the "Euridice."



# Medium for Individual Utterance 229

*Orfeo.*

Non pian - go e non so - spi - ro O mia ca -

- ra Eu - ri - di - ce Che so - spi - rar

... che la - gri - mar non pos - so etc.

Non pian - go e non so - spi - ro

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O mia cara - Eu - ri - di - ce che so - spi -

rar che la - gri - mar non pos - so etc.

Caccini was somewhat more liberal than Peri in the use of floridity and always showed taste and judgement therein. Here is a sample of his style taken from a solo by one of the nymphs in "Euridice":

## Medium for Individual Utterance 231

man - - - - -

- - - - -

- - - ti'I so - le

Caccini also showed that he was not averse to the lascivious allurements of two female voices moving in elementary harmonies. Here is a passage from a scene between two nymphs upon which rest many hundreds of pages in later Italian operas.

val mor - tal in - ge - - - - gno

gia non val mor - tal in - ge - - - gno

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This was the immediate predecessor of the well-known "Salam cantando" in Monteverde's "Orfeo."

The innovations of the Florentine reformers included also the invention of thorough bass, or the basso continuo, as the Italians call it. Ludovico Grossi, called Viadana from the place of his birth, seems to have been the first to use the term basso continuo and on the authority of Prætorius and other writers was long credited with the invention of the thing itself. But it was in 1602 that he published his "Cento concerti ecclesiastici a 1, a 2, a 3, e a 4 voci, con il basso continuo per sonar nell' organo." The basso continuo had been in use for some time before this. It appears in the score of Peri's *Euridice* as well as in the "Nuove Musiche" of Caccini. It was employed in Cavaliere's "Anima e Corpo" and was doubtless utilized in some of the camerata's earlier attempts which have not come down to us.

## Medium for Individual Utterance 233

Just which one of the Florentines devised this method of noting the chords arranged for the support of the voice in the new style matters little. The fact remains that the fundamental principle of related chord harmonies, as distinguished from incidental accords arising in the interweavings of voice parts melodic in themselves, had been recognized and the basis of modern melodic composition established. This, indeed, was not the achievement of the young innovators, but the result of a slow and steady development in the art of composition. The introduction of thorough bass shows us that the reformers had found it essential to the success of their experiments that, in their effort to pack away in solid chords the tangle of parts which had so offended them in the old counterpoint, they should codify to some extent the relations of fundamental chords and contrive a simple method of indicating their sequence in the

## 234 Some Forerunners of Italian Opera

new and elementary kind of accompaniments. They at any rate perceived that the vital fact concerning the new monophonic style was that the melody alone demanded individual independence, while the other parts could not, as in polyphony, ask for equal suffrage, but must sink themselves in the solid and concrete structure of the supporting chord. Thorough bass was in later periods utilized in such music as Bach's and Handel's, but its original nature always stood forth most clearly when it was employed in the support of vocal music approaching the recitative type.

Here, then, we may permit the entire matter to rest. It ought now to be manifest that in their experiments at the resuscitation of the Greek manner of declamation the ardent young Florentines were impelled first of all by the feeling that the obliteration of the text by musical device was a crying evil and that by it dramatic expression was rendered impossible.

## Medium for Individual Utterance 235

Doubtless they felt that their art lacked a medium for the publication of the individual, but it is by no means likely that they realized the full significance of this deficiency or of their own efforts to supply it. Nevertheless, what they did under the incentive of a genuine artistic impulse was in direct line with the whole intellectual progress of the Renaissance. The thing that was patent to them was the importance of studying the models of antiquity to find out how dramatic delineation was to be accomplished; but in doing so they discovered the one element which had been wanting in the Italian lyric drama since its birth in the Mantuan court, namely, the way to set speeches for one actor to music having communicative potency and capable of preserving the intelligibility of the text.

So they completed a cycle of the art of dramatic music, and, having found the link that was missing in the musical chain of Polizi-

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ano's "Orfeo," reincarnated Italy's Arcadian  
prophet, and built the gates through which  
Monteverde ushered lyric composition to the  
broad highway of modern opera.



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